



**BRAND SENSUALITY
AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY**

por

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BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Clarinda Rodrigues was accepted in 2006 as a PhD student in School of Economics in University of Porto. Her main research interest is exploring theoretical and practical issues in sensory branding and sensory marketing. As a practitioner, she is Managing Partner in My.Sensys, a sensory branding agency created in 2009. She has a wide experience as branding consultant and creative director in retail, fashion, cosmetics, wines, pharmaceutical and aluminum systems industries. She has participated as invited lecturer in several Portuguese conferences and seminars about branding and marketing. Her first article was published in 2011 in *Journal Innovative Marketing*.

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary branding and sensory marketing literature stresses the significance and positive impact of sensory dimensions through brand sensuality in relation to brand experiences within a value-generating process. Moreover, it also accounts for the need to fulfill a research gap concerning how sensory dimensions contribute to enhance consumer-based brand equity when consumers experience products and services.

Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to explore, analyze and explain the relationship between brand sensuality and CBBE by answering the overarching research problem: *Is the construct of brand sensuality an antecedent to CBBE in a B2C context?* In this context, three research questions are raised and discussed in the three Essays compiled in this thesis, namely: (1) *From a strategic point of view, how can brands express their sensuality to consumers in the value-generating process?*; (2) *Which is the relationship between brand sensuality and CBBE within a sensory branding framework?* and (3) *From an empirical point of view, does brand sensuality impact directly or indirectly on CBBE?*

Three main conclusions are derived from aforementioned research questions, namely (1) brand sensuality can only be expressed to consumers using sensorial strategies along the value-generating process; (2) brand sensuality, as a construct, is a key driver of brand value in the focus of service provision and (3) brand sensuality impacts directly on brand experiences and indirectly on CBBE.

The main contribution of this thesis consists in integrating brand sensuality for the first time into a CBBE context, along with traditional branding constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, identified in literature as key drivers of brand value. Furthermore, this thesis is the first to explore the direct and indirect impact of brand sensuality on CBBE. Finally, the empirical research uses a sample of real consumers and was conducted online with the collaboration of ACP – the Portuguese Automobile Association. In this regard, it is the first study on car brands, which incorporates brand sensuality as a construct within a sensory-branding framework.

ABSTRACT

A gestão da marca contemporânea e a literatura sobre *marketing* sensorial destacam a importância e o impacto positivo das dimensões sensoriais na sensualidade da marca em relação às experiências da marca no processo de criação de valor. Além disso, também sugerem que existe a necessidade de colmatar uma lacuna de investigação relativa à forma como as dimensões sensoriais contribuem para aumentar o valor da marca para os consumidores, quando estes experimentam produtos e serviços.

Consequentemente, o principal objectivo desta tese consiste em explorar, analisar e explicar a relação entre a sensualidade da marca e o valor da marca para os consumidores, respondendo ao seguinte problema de investigação: *Será o construto da sensualidade da marca um antecedente do valor da marca para os consumidores num contexto B2C?* Desta forma três questões de investigação são formuladas e discutidas nos três artigos compilados nesta tese: (1) *Do ponto de vista estratégico, de que forma podem as marcas exprimir a sua sensualidade aos consumidores no processo de criação de valor?*; (2) *Qual é a relação existente entre a sensualidade da marca e o valor da marca para os consumidores dentro da estrutura teórica do branding sensorial?* e (3) *Do ponto de vista empírico, a sensualidade da marca tem um impacto direto ou indireto no valor da marca para o consumidor?*

Há três conclusões principais que decorrem das acima mencionadas questões de investigação: (1) em primeiro lugar, a sensualidade da marca só pode ser expressa aos consumidores através da utilização de estratégias sensoriais ao longo do processo de criação de valor; (2) em segundo lugar, a sensualidade da marca, como um construto, é a principal força motriz do valor da marca num contexto de fornecimento de serviços (3) e, por último, a sensualidade da marca tem um impacto direto nas experiências da marca e indireto no valor da marca para os consumidores.

O principal contributo desta tese consiste em, pela primeira vez, integrar a sensualidade da marca num contexto de criação do valor da marca para os consumidores com outros construtos tradicionais da gestão da marca, como a personalidade da marca, a relação da

marca e a experiência da marca, identificados na literatura como motores da criação de valor. Adicionalmente, esta tese é a primeira a explorar o impacto direto e indireto da sensualidade da marca na criação do valor da marca para os consumidores. Finalmente, a pesquisa empírica utiliza uma amostra de consumidores reais e foi conduzida em colaboração com o ACP – Automóvel Club de Portugal. Neste âmbito, é o primeiro estudo sobre marcas de automóveis que incorpora a sensualidade da marca como um constructo dentro da estrutura teórica do *branding* sensorial.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Creating strong and powerful brands has been of interest for brand scholars and marketers for a long time, and it is still an expanding field of research. During the last decades, marketing has reinvented itself as a discipline in contemporary society and has drawn on the conceptual accomplishments of the past in order to create a renewed focus on consumers as individuals with human senses and brands as images. In this on-going transformation, my observation is that more and more firms are delivering value propositions based on the co-creation of the experience where the brand becomes the experience. Following this evidence, I argue that marketers are adopting emotional-based brand strategies in order to differentiate and position a brand in the human mind. In order to address this less researched area, the present thesis focuses on the analysis of the relationships between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity.

Following a brief background on the relevance of this subject, the reader is provided with a deeper introduction to the evolving branding logic in relation to the value generating process and the importance of experiences and human senses as drivers of brand value. This is followed by a problem discussion with regard to brand-building process in the contemporary society, which leads to an overarching research problem and the purpose of the thesis. Thereafter, the compilation of Essays is presented and finally the structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.1 Background

In the field of marketing, a paradigm shift from the traditional goods-dominant logic to the new service-dominant logic (SDL) is taking place (Payne *et al.*, 2007). The existing dominant logic is moving from the exchange of tangible goods to one of intangibles like knowledge, processes and skills (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The new view is challenging the traditional goods-dominant logic, recognizing its limitations whereby the customer perspective has often been neglected. Furthermore, the newer approach emphasizes the customer as a co-creator of value, where the “*brand becomes the experience*” (Prahalad and Ramasvamy, 2004).

The customer perspective is central in a service-dominant logic, in accordance with the need to rethink the traditional view of marketing in favour of a more value-based logic. This involves customer value creation as a way of redefining markets in contrast to traditional conceptualizations (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005). The point of departure of the service dominant-logic is the fact that service is the common denominator in exchanges processes and not some form of exchange. This new view also posits that customer value and customer value creating processes are built upon a supplier's ability to learn and understand how to support the co-creation activities of the customer (Payne *et al.*, 2007).

Given this view, it is crucial to understand how the branding logic has evolved in the last decades and why human senses and experiences are pointed out as drivers of brand value within a centered-customer perspective. The following point discusses these relevant issues on branding and highlights how brand value is conceptualize and determined along the value-generating process.

1.1.1 The evolving brand logic

Branding, as a discipline, reflects this evolving value-based logic in a B2C context over the past several decades. Merz *et al.* (2009) identify four distinct eras, which differ from each other in terms of how consumers view brands and its primary brand value focus, namely (1) the goods-focus brand era; (2) the value-focus brand era; (3) the relationship-focus brand era, and (4) the stakeholder-focus brand era.

The good-focus brand era covers theories on branding which view brands as identifiers and suggest that firms use brands as a means for consumers to recognize goods on sight. This product-centered thinking in the branding literature is grounded on transactional marketing (TM) model which has its roots on the behavioural theory of the firm and microeconomic theory. The model emphasizes “goods logic” and puts the consumer in a mass-market context with average needs where advertising is seen as a significant marketing tool in acquiring customers. Moreover, transactional marketing focuses on single transactions and short-term exchanges between a passive buyer and an active

seller. Hence, brand value was conceptualized as embedded in the physical goods (*operand* resources) and created as a result of a discrete transaction, i.e. an output orientation. Given this branding perspective, brand value is determined by value-in-exchange and physical goods are branded to potential consumers who remain passive in the value-generating process (Merz *et al.*, 2009).

As an opposition to the goods-focus brand era, branding and marketing literature from the mid 20th century onwards highlights brands as functional and symbolic images instead of identifiers. These functional and symbolic value-focus branding perspectives posit that creating unique and clearly defined brand images enhances firms' competitive advantages, by both enabling firms to differentiate from competitors and by identifying the needs that brands promise to satisfy. In this regard, the brand value is determined by the creation of brand image in the value-in-exchange process (Merz *et al.*, 2009). By first focusing on brands' functional associations, scholars argue that consumers select brands, as part of the market offering, to solve their externally generated needs. The brand focus is on functional benefits and brands are targeted towards potential consumers who remained passive in the value-generating process. In this regard, the brand value has an output market orientation and consumers are regarded as *operand* resources as in the goods-focus brand perspective. The symbolic value-focus branding emphasizes the relationship between symbolic benefits and consumer choice. Brands are conceptualized as means to fulfill consumers' internal generated needs, such as social position, group membership, self-enhancement and ego-identification (Park *et al.*, 1986). Hence, brand focus is directed towards symbolic benefits with an output market orientation. Though consumers are still regarded as *operand* resources, brand scholars started to conceptualize brands as more *operant* resources.

Around the 1990s, the branding focus switched from the brand image based on functional and symbolic benefits to the consumer as the primary driver of the value-generating process. Inspired by service logic, brand scholars proposed a more relational and interactive process, emphasizing the consumer as a co-creator of value and interactions, networks and relationship as central to firm's marketing strategy and tactics. Whereas in the value-focus perspective brand value is said to be determined by

value-in-exchange based on associations that firms create and communicate to consumers, the relationship perspective posits that brand value is created by the consumers' perceived value-in-use as the result of its dyadic relationship with the brand (Merz *et al.*, 2009).

More recently, in the early 2000s, the stakeholder-focus brand era highlights a more collective and dynamic process of brand consumption within society (Merz *et al.*, 2009). According to this perspective, brand communities and all stakeholders constitute *operant* resources and the value co-creation process is regarded as a highly dynamic, social and interactive process between the brand, the firm and all stakeholders (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Hence, brand value emerges from the interactions within the boundaries of brand communities, in which consumption experiences are directly and indirectly shared by its members and mutual appreciation for the brand or product is enhanced (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

1.1.2 Experiences and human senses as brand value drivers

As discussed above, branding literature “*has evolved way from a brand logic that viewed brands as identifiers and embedded in goods and brand value as determined through value-in-exchange to a new brand logic that views brands as dynamic and social processes and brand value as a brand's perceived value-in-use determined by all stakeholders*” (Merz *et al.*, 2009, p. 344). Moreover, this shift in branding demonstrates that consumers have evolved from exogenous to endogenous in the brand value creation process and that brands have shifted from directly connected to the market offer (*operand* resources) to existing independently of the market offer (*operant* resources). This shift in branding literature reflects the evolution of marketing in general towards a more service-dominant logic.

With the emergence of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999) and sensory marketing (Krishna, 2010; Hultén, 2011), the traditional brand logic has been challenged by a more individualized, holistic and consumer-centric brand perspective. Grounded on service-dominant logic, this emerging branding perspective suggests that the value of a

brand emerges when interactions occur through the consumer's multi-sensory brand-experiences in the value-generating process, creating a symbiosis between the individual and the brand (Hultén, 2011). In this regard, multi-sensory brand-experiences are considered the primary driver of the value-generating process, in which both brands and consumers are *operant* resources. Similar to relationship- and stakeholders-focus brand era, brand value is created by the consumers' perceived value-in-use. In this regard, sensorial strategies based on sight, sound, taste, smell and touch play a central role in delivering brand value to consumers.

Interestingly, as leading subphenomenon of mainstream marketing, the human senses have once again been recognized as the vehicles through which consumers experience the world around them. In relation to products and services, human senses, sensations and sensory experiences are considered emergent marketing paradigms (Achrol and Kotler, 2012). A basic assumption in sensory marketing, defined as "*marketing that engages the consumer's senses and affects their behavior*" (Krishna, 2010, p.2), is that each individual has a subjective experience, which can be described as "experience logic", and that logic is individual and personal based on how individual human senses perceive and interpret the multi-sensory brand experience (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

Academic research on the human senses has also shown that different sensory dimensions impact on consumer behavior and perceptions of goods and services. Most of these empirical studies state that senses are linked to memories, emotions and feelings and establish strong physical and psychological interactions with goods and services.

Research on the sense of sight indicates a high correlation between, for example, the design quality of visual stimuli and financial performance (Hertenstein and Platt, 2001; Wallace, 2001). Advertisements, colour, design, lighting, logo, packaging, product design and other visual stimuli that make it possible to differentiate products, enhance loyalty, prevent clutter and fend off competition (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

The sense of smell is regarded one of the most powerful for creating associations and evoking memories (Aggleton and Waskett, 1999). The perception of olfaction is hedonic and based on affective evaluation of smells and which impacts on consumer moods and psychological arousal (Ellen and Bone, 1998). Moreover, research has shown that ambient scents have positive effects on both store and product evaluations (Spangenberg *et al.*, 1996) and the pleasant scents can enhance customer shopping behaviour in terms of increased expenditures and more money spent in the store (Spangenberg *et al.*, 1996; Morrin and Chebat, 2005). In sensory marketing, scents can be used in strategic marketing to express the brand's identity and strengthen its image, or as a marketing tactic to advertise a product.

Tactile sense research points out the differences in individual motivations in touch, product attributes that support touch, as well as situational factors supporting touch (Peck and Childers, 2010) as drivers of individualized perceptions. By using touch as an individual's preference for having information about a product, a positive affective response might result in more favourable attitudes towards a product (Peck and Wiggins, 2006). Material, surface, temperature, weight, form and steadiness can all contribute positively to the tactile experience of the brand and differentiate it from competitors thus enhancing loyalty.

Research on the sense of sound has shown that music exerts a positive impact on buying behavior and store atmosphere (Areni and Kim, 1993; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Morrison, 2002) by creating associations and evoking memories. Several empirical studies reveal positive correlations between music and time spent shopping (Milliman, 1982; Kellaris and Kent, 1992; Morrison, 2002), recognizing its evocative power as a means of differentiating a firm and impacting on consumer moods and buying behavior. Different kinds of sensory expressions (jingles, voices, music, atmosphere theme and advertency, sound brand and signature sound) can facilitate a sound experience and can be applied consistently throughout a firm's sensory marketing, so as to achieve differentiation (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

Finally, the sense of taste is considered one of the most distinctly emotional, due to its capacity to facilitate social exchanges among people, its inner connections to other senses and high degree of interaction between firms and customers at a personal level. Research shows that a taste experience persuades customers to stay longer in a shop, which in turn leads to higher consumption. Firms can apply tastes to flavor a brand and give it new hedonic dimensions and “spice” its brand, so as to keep it fresh in consumer’s memory.

In conclusion, academic research on human senses stresses how sensory dimensions impact the brand value co-creation process as a result of multi-sensory brand-experiences (Hultén, 2011). These studies assume that human senses influence the ways brands are perceived by consumers, when they experience products and services, and highlight the importance of sensory dimensions as facilitators of emotional engagement and interaction between consumers and brands.

1.2 Problem discussion

Recent literature on branding shares the perspective that brand equity takes place in consumer’s minds (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1993). This highlights the importance of brands as *operant* resources in marketing strategy and consumers as active co-creators of brand value (Merz *et al.*, 2009). Of particular interest is the assumption that consumer-based brand equity is multidimensional (Pappu *et al.*, 2005). In this regard, some sub-dimensions of brand association, such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), brand relationship (Blackston, 1992; Jones, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006) and brand experience (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) are suggested to antecedents of brand equity.

Brand personality is identified in literature as the most important form of brand association which influences brand equity (Aaker, 1991, 1997) and has been proposed as antecedent to consumer-based brand equity, which enriches the measurement of brand knowledge (Pappu *et al.*, 2005). More recently, Esch *et al.* (2006) proposed a model which combines brand knowledge and brand relationship as antecedents to

CBBE. This branding perspective suggests that the brand co-creation process is dynamic and relational (Blackston, 1992; Merz *et al.*, 2009; Grönroos, 2007) and that its value rests in the minds of consumers, opinion makers and stakeholders as a result of a social interaction (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Jones, 2005). Furthermore, Esch *et al.* (2006) claim that the research on brand relationship construct should be combined with experiential marketing techniques (brand experiences), since it results in increased emotional engagement and interactions between the consumer and the brand. Brand experience, as a concept, is considered a dimension of brand knowledge (Keller, 2003) and is intended to contribute to consumer-based brand equity directly and indirectly through brand personality associations (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

The brand-building process has received increased research attention during the last decades as a result of more and more brands striving to differentiate in highly competitive markets. With the emergence of a society characterized by information overload, a lack of time and an aestheticization of everyday life, traditional brand strategies built upon transactional marketing (TM) or relational marketing (RM) are being challenged. Furthermore, theoretical concerns are raised of how sensory dimensions can create brand value for brands as Apple, Mercedes or Starbucks (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). In this context, it might be argued that sensory dimensions stand as a way to theoretically link the human senses to brand experiences. Nevertheless, to this point, prior research on branding has not been able to capture this phenomenon as a whole and theoretically integrate sensory-based constructs into a conceptual framework with regard to the significance of sensory dimensions for brand experiences in the brand-building and value-generating process (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Schmitt, 1999, 2012; Krishna, 2011; Keller, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003).

As discussed earlier, consumers perceive brands through the human senses and derive brand images which are said to contain “*the meaning of the brand for consumers*” (Keller, 1993, p. 3) in the value-generating process. Each individual perceives and experiences service, both goods and service components, through the senses. It is in the human brain that the sensory information is stored (sensory memory) and an image is created in terms of mental conceptions and imagination (short-term memory) to be

further activated by long-term memory. This image is the result of the positive or negative sensory experiences an individual derives from a service that is synonymous with the brand (Grönroos, 2007). As suggested by Hultén *et al.* (2009, p. 13), deepening and individualizing new sensory experiences of different kinds “*can increase the quality of customer treatment, which can lead to stronger brand recognition and brand image in the long term.*”

In this thesis, I conceptualize brand value as embedded in multi-sensory brand-experiences and created as a result of a distinct and unique brand sensuality. In this regard, brand value is proposed to be determined by perceived value when consumers experience services and goods by using their senses. My assumption is that by focusing on sensory dimensions following the human senses consumers are able to select brands to solve their hedonic and aesthetics orientated needs. Hence, brand sensuality plays an important role in the value-generating process by facilitating the interaction between appealing brands and active consumers, who look for sensory and experiential benefits in the value-generating process.

Following this perspective, I define brand sensuality as:

“The firm’s ability to seduce and engage consumers emotionally through the involvement of the five human senses, when consumers experience goods and services as a result of multi-sensory brand-experiences.”

It is evident that although branding and marketing literature suggests a customer-centric view of a firm’s marketing strategy and tactics, as well as the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity, there is a strong call for theory development on the relationship between brand sensuality and CBBE. Furthermore, an integrated model of consumer-based brand equity incorporating brand sensuality with other branding constructs is needed, allowing marketing scholars to rethink each of constructs separately (i.e. brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality) and focus on the their relationships with consumer-based brand equity.

Consequently, there are theoretical and empirically problems that need to be addressed. Firstly, to rethink traditional branding strategies in the value-generating process in a society where consumers seek new consumption experiences in their everyday lives and the consumption process has been affected by the constant need for novelty, imagery, emotion and fun (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982; Schmitt, 1999). Secondly, to explore how brand sensuality as a construct *interdependently* and *independently* influence consumer-based brand equity and, finally, integrate this construct into a consumer-based brand equity context.

1.3 Research problem and purpose

The insufficient knowledge on brand sensuality and its relation with consumer-based brand equity is the focus of this thesis. Brand sensuality, in my opinion, should be considered as a key determinant to create a strong brand image in consumers' minds in the long term. Furthermore, brand sensuality allows both scholars and marketers to rethink brands as dynamic brands imbued of sensorial dimensions which constantly appeal to consumer's senses along the value-generating process.

Academic research substantiates the significance and positive impact of sensory dimensions in brand experiences, but there is a research gap concerning how sensory dimensions contribute to enhance the perceived value-in-use as a result of a multi-sensory brand-experience. Hence, brand sensuality, as a construct, is of significance in this thesis, since it can increase our knowledge about the role of human senses in contemporary branding.

Seeking to address these empirical and theoretical research issues, the following overreaching research problem is stated:

Is the construct of brand sensuality an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context?

This research problem gives rise to three research questions, namely (1) From a strategic point of view, how can brands express their sensuality to consumers in the value-generating process? (2) Which is the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity within a sensory branding framework? (3) From an empirical point of view, does brand sensuality impact directly or indirectly on consumer-based brand equity?

Based on the overarching research problem, the main objective of this thesis is *to explore, analyze and explain the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity*. This will be achieved by (1) exploring and analyzing traditional brand strategies in comparison to sensorial strategies as a means to express brand sensuality in a B2C context; (2) proposing brand sensuality as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity within a sensory branding framework and (3) providing empirical evidence that brand sensuality, as a construct, is a key antecedent to consumer-based brand equity.

1.4 Essay compilation

Three Essays are compiled within this thesis as a base for answering the aforementioned research problem. The Essays are summarized in Chapter 4 and are provided as a full version following the list of references for Chapters 1 – 5. The first research question concerning how brands can strategically express their sensuality to consumers in the value-generating process in order to differentiate and position a brand in the human mind is addressed in Essay 1. This paper is entirely conceptual in nature and it is developed through the context of discovery. It presents a review of literature of theoretically relevant work from marketing, branding and consumer psychology and demonstrates that in literature there is a gap with respect to how consumers perceive, as opposed to actually experience a brand image through the human senses. Moreover, it defines and elaborates the concept of sensorial strategies within a sensory branding framework and accounts for the need to apply strategic brand approaches in a B2C context.

The second research question aiming at exploring and discussing the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity is addressed in Essay 2. This paper is entirely conceptual and presents the main theoretical perspectives on consumer-based brand equity, followed by a discussion of CBBE multidimensionality, in which traditional constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience are analyzed. Moreover, it discusses the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity within a sensory branding framework and ends by proposing brand sensuality as a possible antecedent to CBBE.

Finally, the third research question, concerning the measurement of the impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity, is addressed in Essay 3. This paper analyze and discuss: 1) the significance of a brand sensuality construct and its effect on CBBE, 2) how brand sensuality as a construct could be seen as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity and 3) how firms could apply brand sensuality in order to create a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity.

1.5 Thesis structure

In addition to this introductory chapter, there are four chapters accounting for the theoretical framework, methodology, compiled Essays, and major conclusions and contributions of the present thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework. Firstly, the main theoretical perspectives on consumer-based brand equity are presented, followed by a discussion of CBBE multidimensionality. Secondly, it is provided an overview about sensory branding, analyzing concepts such as multi-sensory brand-experiences, sensorial strategies and brand sensuality. The chapter ends with a conclusion, in which a theoretical synthesis is provided.

Chapter 3 concerns the methodology. In this chapter the scientific approach behind this research is stated, and the overall research strategy is outlined. Firstly, a general

discussion is made over the undertaken research process followed by a detailed description of the pre-understanding process, literature review and the methods used in the empirical study, as well as a discussion in terms of validity and reliability. Thereafter, a brief note is given regarding the overview of the research process.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the compiled Essays, serving as an introduction to each of the Essays and accounting for the rationale of the study, research problem and aim, theoretical framework applied, empirical data, and theoretical and managerial contributions.

Chapter 5 provides the reader with the major conclusions, implications and suggestions of future research. Based on the overarching research problem, the major conclusions are presented and contributions are accounted for theoretical, methodological and managerial issues. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the thesis and proposes ideas for future research.

Following the five aforementioned chapters, the three Essays compiled for the thesis are provided in their full versions (Essays 1 - 3). Thereafter, the standardized questionnaire used in Essay 3 as a measurement instrument (Appendix I), the list of items (Appendix II) and the compiled data (Appendix 3) are appended.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework firstly outlines the theories on consumer-based brand equity and discusses the multidimensionality of CBBE, deriving three main key concepts: brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience. Secondly, it is provided an overview about sensory branding, analyzing concepts such as multi-sensory brand-experiences, sensorial strategies and brand sensuality. Finally, a theoretical synthesis is provided.

2.2 Consumer-based brand equity

As discussed in the introduction, any direct or indirect encounter between a brand and a consumer might impact on the mental picture of a brand in the memory of consumers (i.e. brand image) and contribute to brand equity. This might occur when a consumer is exposed to any kind of environmental input and stimuli perceived by the human senses as a result of marketing activities (Keller, 1993, 2002; de Chernatony and Horn, 2003). The process immediately establishes primary and secondary associations with and/or perceptions of the brand (Keller, 1993, 2002). Raggio and Leone (2007) suggest that brand associations and/or perceptions create brand equity through their existence in the consumer's memory, and not by the purchase itself. Furthermore, brand associations are identified as means of enhancing differentiation (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999) and indicate whether or not the promise of a certain brand is salient (Raggio and Leone, 2007). In this regard, an overview of the main theoretical perspectives on consumer-based brand equity is provided, followed by a discussion about the key concepts within CBBE.

2.2.1 Main theories of consumer-based brand equity

Theories on consumer-based brand equity put in evidence the differential effect on consumer response to marketing activities, whereas there is a large disagreement on its

sources. The most dominant influence on this body of research are Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) conceptualizations. Aaker (1991, p. 15) defines brand equity as a "*set of categories of brand assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name or symbol that add to (subtract from) the value provided by a product or a service*". This multidimensional conceptualization of brand equity includes brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. On the hand, Keller (1993, p. 8) defines brand equity as "*the differential effect of a brand knowledge on consumer response to marketing efforts of a brand.*" In the theoretical framework proposed by Keller, brand knowledge is defined in terms of brand awareness and brand image. Kapferer (1997) also extended Keller's conceptualization and proposed six brand assets: brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, evocations and familiarity and liking.

The common denominator in these conceptualizations is that brand equity has a consumer-based brand focus, since it exists "within a consumer" and not within a brand (Keller, 1993). As proposed by Keller (1993, p.2), brand equity "*occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory*". Thus, the differential consumer response to the marketing of a brand moderates the "*impact of marketing activities on consumer's actions*" (Raggio and Leone, 2007, p. 380). Moreover, brand equity is regarded as one of many possible factors contributing to brand value, and it has been suggested that brand equity stands for what a brand really means for consumers (Raggio and Leone, 2007).

2.2.2 Key concepts within consumer-based brand equity

As discussed earlier, recent empirical studies explain the multidimensionality of consumer-brand based equity (Pappu *et al.*, 2005) and suggest the incorporation of some sub-dimensions of brand associations, such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), brand relationship (Blackston, 1992; Jones, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006) and brand experience (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) as antecedents of brand equity. However, the extent to which some of these sub-dimensions *interdependently* and *independently* influence consumer-based

brand equity has not been fully explored and is proposed in the literature as a future research direction.

2.2.2.1 Brand Personality

The notion of brand personality is commonly accepted by many academics and advertising practitioners as a key determinant of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Biel, 1993; Keller, 1993). The pioneering brand personality scale proposed by Aaker (1997) based on personality measurement theory (e.g. Norman, 1963; Osgood *et al.*, 1957), initiated a new stream of research within a relational consumption approach (Keller, 2002; Azaoulay and Kapferer, 2003).

Defined as “*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand*” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), brand personality is either treated in the marketing literature as brand identity as a whole (Aaker, 1997) or a dimension of it (Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1993; Azaoulay and Kapferer, 2003) and serves a symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993), providing the basis for distinct and sustainable competitive advantage (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999; Freeling and Forbes, 2005). It is argued that consumers can easily ascribe human characteristics to inanimate brand objects and that they think about brands as if they were celebrities, famous historical figures or just human characters (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1984-85; Rook, 1985).

In order for brands to serve as a legitimate relationship partner, Fournier (1998) and McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) suggest that marketers animate the brand as a dynamic entity in the consumer’s mind and constantly reinterpret individual perceptions about brand personality, so as “to keep the brand fresh”. Some scholars argue that a strong brand personality increases consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), as well as levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998), evokes emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993) and encourages active and systematic processing with high consumer motivation (Biel, 1993).

Academic research on the antecedents of brand personality suggests that behavioral trait inferences are based on both physical and psychological elements of the product

and the elements of brand identity (Batra *et al.*, 1993; Kapferer, 1994; Plummer, 1984-85), thus facilitating interactions with the non-material world (Fournier, 1998). Kum *et al.* (2012) state that brand personality inferences are contingent upon products meanings and vary for symbolic and functional products. Furthermore, a number of studies demonstrate that the greater the congruity between the perceived product user image and the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1986; Sirgy *et al.*, 2000) regarded as a cognitive referent in assessing symbolic cues, the greater the preference for the brand (e.g. Malhotra, 1998; Sirgy, 1982; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010; Nobre *et al.*, 2010).

2.2.2.2 Brand Relationship

Considered as a logical extension of brand personality, the concept of consumer-brand relationships is identified in the marketing literature as a long-term interactive process involving the brand, the consumer (Blackston, 1992; Fournier, 1998; Grönroos, 2007) and other brand stakeholders (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) in the value-generating process, and contributes to forming a strong brand image (Aaker, 1996). Of particular interest is the brand relationship framework proposed by Fournier (1998), based on the brand as an active, enthusiastic and productive relationship partner. In this regard, the brand is perceived as a behavioural entity that adds meanings to consumers' lives (Ligas and Cotte, 1999) and facilitates multifaceted holistic relationships in which brand experiences play an important role (Schmitt, 1999) in binding consumers together.

When relating to brands on a trivial and daily basis, consumers follow the norms that govern social relationships, manifest different levels of reciprocity (Bhattacharya and Bolton, 2000) and are sensitive or benevolent to the acts of brand transgression or product recall (Aggarwal, 2004; Korkofingas and Ang, 2011). Moreover, Aaker *et al.* (2004) suggest a relationship between brand personality and the kind of relationship the consumer establishes with brands. Specifically, their research show that "sincere" brands tend to facilitate close, increasingly intimate and long-term relationships based on trust, in which consumers are more sensitive to the effects of transgression. By contrast, excitement brands tend to nurture enthusiastic but less stable relationships and customers are more kindly disposed towards acts of transgression.

Merz *et al.* (2009) argue that brand value is co-created by affective relationships that consumers form with brands as a result of direct or indirect brand experiences. In this context, the sum of experiences that the consumer establishes with a particular brand in different encounters forms the brand relationship (Grönroos, 2007). The experiential view of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) has sparked renewed interest in consumer affective commitment to the brand. Grounded in the relationship marketing literature, commitment is proposed in the consumer-brand relationship literature as one of the facets of brand relationship quality (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Fournier, 1998). Furthermore, research on buying behaviour emphasizes the role of brand attachment, together with brand trust and brand satisfaction, in building successful brands in the long-term (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006).

It is important to note that similarities between brand and interpersonal relationships facilitate high-quality relationships based on a sense of commitment and belonging that bonds consumers to brands as a result of positive experiences (Fournier, 1998; de Chernatony and McDonald, 1998; Ghodeswar, 2008). An empirical study by Reimann *et al.* (2012) shows that strong positive sentiment towards brands is more evident in recently formed, closer consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, emotional arousal decreases over as the relationship develops or becomes irrelevant for brands towards which consumers are not willing to establish closer connections. Research also suggests that identification between the brand and consumer self-concepts increases over the course of the relationship, so that consumers tend to consider the brand as part of their lives.

Some scholars point to intimacy and personalized consumer treatment as one of the most emotional triggers for enhancing consumer-brand relationships (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). This view is consistent with a service logic perspective, which posits that consumers are relevant individually and that firms should treat them intimately and personally. Moreover, the sum of consumer inferences resulting either from brand attitudes and brand behaviour contribute to forming positive or negative judgments of its role as a partner in its dyadic relationship with the brand (Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Fournier, 1998). As a result, consumers build mental images of ideal partners and these

partners' traits are considered before engaging in an intimate relationship with brands (Fletcher *et al.*, 2000).

2.2.2.3 Brand Experience

A significant part of the literature shares the perspective that customers interact with firms holistically and focus on specific contexts in isolation (Lemke *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). An experience results from an interactive process (Gentile *et al.*, 2007) between a consumer and a firm and is conceptualized as “*the customer's subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm*” (Lemke *et al.*, 2010). The seductive aspects of experience are considered to attract consumers' attention and cause them to be intrigued, since experience is engaging, nonpartisan, pseudodiagnostic and endogenous (Hoch, 2002). Moreover, consumers are no longer passive receptors of firms' marketing actions and their perceptions of brands are individually-based and dependent on past experiences, either positive or negative, short-lived or long-lasting (de Chernatony, 1993, Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

The concept of brand experience was recently introduced into the marketing literature by Brakus *et al.* (2009, p. 59) and defined as “*subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments*”. Drawing on insights from Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999), these scholars identified four brand dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural) which are evoked, directly or indirectly, by a set of distinctive related stimuli when consumers search for, shop for or consume brands (Schmitt, 1999; Arnold *et al.*, 2005; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). With the emergence of the sensory marketing framework, branding has broadened its experiential perspective to include a multi-sensory brand approach (Krishna, 2010, 2011; Hultén, 2011).

Few empirical studies have sought to document the impact of brand experiences on consumer behaviour. One exception is Brakus *et al.* (2009), which show that brand experience has a positive behavioural impact on consumer satisfaction, loyalty and brand associations, through brand personality. Moreover, it has become clear that brand

experiences are not motivationally orientated (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) and that brand value can be created indirectly even if consumers do not become brand buyers (Merz *et al.*, 2009).

It is commonly accepted that experiences differ in their memorability, and few number are retrievable and result in word-of-mouth (Lemke *et al.*, 2010). According to O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002), pleasure derived from experiences is transient and short-lived. In this regard, pleasure will become enjoyment and an optimal experience if it generates intense attention, psychological growth and a sense of achievement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Gordon (2006) argues that brands are coded in consumer memory on an emotional and cognitive basis. These somatic markers (Damasio, 1999) are held in long-term memory and result from the sum of positive or negative experiences that consumers have with brands. Pham (1998) argues that experiences act as a source of information, in which positive feelings lead to favourable brand evaluations, whereas negative feelings the converse. Furthermore, differences in individual optimum stimulation levels (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1992) and individual states of mind (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) influence how experiences are perceived and coded in memory.

The experiential view claims that products and services project multi-sensory cues that need to be seen, tasted, heard, smelled or touched to be truly felt and appreciated (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In their dyadic relationship with brands, consumers are becoming more sceptical of advertising stimuli that can only be confirmed through experience (Hoch, 2002). Direct trial during a brand experience is sometimes regarded as a means of obtaining experimental benefits. Moreover, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) argue that experiential appeals activate impulsive or goal-directed behaviour and facilitate brand engagement.

2.3 Sensory branding

The concept of sensory branding has its origins in the book “*Brand Sense*” published by Lindstrom in 2005 and received a great deal of attention among practitioners worldwide. Grounded on the assumption that the consumer has become a “sense producer” (Filser, 2002), sensory branding highlights symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetics values of consumption and proposes that powerful brands should be built using touch, taste, smell, sight and sound strategies. Nevertheless, in the academic debate on branding, “*remarkably little attention focuses on brand*” in the new service-dominant logic (Payne *et al.*, 2007, p. 379). Hence, an experience-based co-creation perspective is suggested in order to emphasize brands and branding in terms of co-creation and personalized experiences. This corresponds to the notion of experiential marketing (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982; Schmitt, 1999) and sensory marketing (Krishna, 2010; Hultén, 2011) from where contexts, aesthetics, emotions and symbolic aspects of consumer and multi-sensory brand-experiences are significant (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

2.3.1 Multi-sensory brand-experiences

Drawing on theories relating to branding and experiences, Hultén (2011, p. 259) highlights the importance of the five human senses so often neglected in marketing literature and proposes that “*multi-sensory brand-experiences supports individual value creation and refers to how individuals reacts when a firm interacts, and supports their purchase and consumption process through the involvement of the five human senses in generating customer value, experiences, and brand as image.*”

This view is in accordance with many empirical studies which implicitly or explicitly assume that human senses influence the ways brands are perceived. As Brakus *et al.* (2009) note, since brand-related sensory stimulation engages the mind and body, the consumer might be willing to receive further stimulation if the experience is positive. Thus, the intensity of the brand experience is dependent on the number of brand dimensions used to create the experience and on how stimulation is managed, so as to engage consumers emotionally (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Furthermore, brand experience becomes more effective and memorable, if a growing number of senses is engaged (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Lindstrom, 2005). Human senses act as filters or

vehicles for experiencing products and services (Achrol and Kotler, 2012) and are a fast-track for engaging consumers emotionally (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Nevertheless, consumers are unaware of the influence of sensory dimensions on their preferences and judgments, which suggests that integrative judgments based on multisensory input are non-conscious or belong to a “hardwire genre”: non-conscious, heuristic or systematic. (Raghubir, 2010).

It is important to note that consumers, as individuals, perceive brand stimuli differently, based on their sensory characteristics and information content (Sheth *et al.*, 1999), which lead to either positive or negative affective outcomes (Oliver, 1997). Moreover, Solomon (1999) argues that distinctive stimuli are more likely to be noticed. An empirical study from Gentile *et al.* (2007) demonstrates that the sensorial component was rated as most relevant across all well-known and successful products. The study also recognises the importance of experiential features in the value-generating process, in which experiences dazzle the five senses and constantly stimulate consumers’ minds by creating holistic, integrated and memorable experiences (Schmitt, 1999). In this regard, expressing and differentiating products and services as sensations allows firms to attract consumer’s attention, even in a message-saturated encounter, influence their brand perceptions and engage them emotionally (Krishna, 2011).

2.3.2 Sensorial strategies

As a concept, sensorial strategies were firstly introduced by Hultén (2011) in his pioneering study on multi-sensory brand-experiences. Based on emotional and psychological elements instead of functional attributes in the value-generating process, sensorial strategies “*aim at differentiating and expressing a product, a service or a firm’s identity in relation to the human senses.*” (ibid, p. 263). In this regard, a brand strategy is defined as sensorial when it appeals to one or more senses in the consumer’s mind. From a tactical and strategic perspective, sensorial strategies for sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, either individually or combined, can be expressed by sensors, sensations and sensory expressions in the value-generating process.

At an explanatory level, sensors are proposed as communicative means for determining the sensorial strategies, since it is possible to transmit stimuli and gather information about the human mind and senses, through technological devices, observation methods, employees and direct interaction with customers (ibid). On the other hand, sensations defined as “*as emotion or feeling that deliberately links the human mind and the senses*” (ibid, p. 264) aim at expressing a distinct and sensory-based brand identity and value and thus facilitate the multi-sensory brand experience. Finally, sensory expressions, conceptualized as “*an experience trigger that clarifies a brand’s identity and values and leaves an imprint in the customer’s mind*” (ibid, p. 265) aim at characterizing the brand’s identity and its uniqueness in relation to each of the five human senses.

2.3.3 Brand sensuality

In the brand-management domain, little attention has been paid to how brand sensuality, as a concept, impacts on consumer behaviour in purchase and consumption processes. In a broad perspective, the existing studies acknowledge mainly for the impact of sensory dimensions on the pleasure created by the human senses, when consumers relate to appealing products and services. According to Krishna (2011), the appeal of a product or service can be increased either by creating new sensations or by emphasizing or drawing attention to existing sensations. In this regard, sensorial strategies are proposed as a means of differentiation which are able to affect perception, judgment and consumer behaviour and establish strong emotional ties with consumers (Hultén, 2011; Krishna, 2011).

Research on consumer sensory processing shows that sensory dimensions enhance the product and atmospherics experience, increase preferences for a given product and purchase likelihood, lead to greater confidence in product evaluations, increase the amount consumers are willing to pay for products and services and affect behaviour and mood positively (Grohmann *et al.*, 2007; McCabe and Nowlis, 2003; Peck and Childers, 2003; Peck and Shu, 2009; Herz, 1997, 1998, 2000; Morrin and Ratneshwar, 2000, 2003; Hirsch, 1995; Krishna *et al.*, 2010; Hornick, 1992; Schiffman *et al.*, 1995; Villemure *et al.*, 2003; Baron, 1997; Milliman, 1982; 1986; Dubé *et al.*, 1995).

Research on sensory processing also demonstrates that intrinsic sensory dimensions influence consumers' perceptions of product freshness, taste, weight and quality. A study by Zampini and Spence (2004) demonstrates that changing the sound a potato chip makes when bitten (e.g. loudness and frequency) can influence the perceived characteristics of the product (e.g. how fresh the potato is perceived to be). Moreover, Raghubir and Krishna (1999) show that whereas consumers perceive elongated containers to contain more, their actual experience contradicts this belief, subsequently convincing them that they have consumed more from the less elongated container.

On the other hand, empirical research on sensory dimensions provides evidence that brand-related stimulus create physical attraction, increase the level of attention, signals the status of a product, influence hedonic perceptions of products and have a positive impact on consumption behaviour (Bellizi *et al.*, 1983; Chandon *et al.*, 2008; Dubois *et al.*, 2011; Leclerc *et al.*, 1994; Allison and Uhl, 1964; Brown *et al.*, 1973; Krishna, 2011; Ittersum and Wansink, 2011; Hultén, 2012).

A growing body of studies on consumer research demonstrate that sensory dimensions have a positive impact on product and store evaluations, brand recall and recognition. Moreover, as a whole, research suggests that consumer evaluations tend to be more positive when sensory dimensions are congruent and naturally reinforcing. Spangenberg *et al.* (2005) demonstrate that a pleasant ambient scent improve store evaluations when it was seasonally congruent with the background music. In another study, Spangenberg *et al.* (2006) find that consumers increased their expenditures in a store selling clothing when the scent released in the air was congruent with the type of clothing being sold. In a field study, Morrin and Chebat (2005) show that impulsive shoppers spend more money when pleasant music is playing in a shopping mall. By contrast, contemplative shoppers or those who do not make unplanned purchases increase their expenditures when a pleasant scent was being released.

In the domain of advertising, researchers have addressed the impact of hedonic perception on consumer behaviour. Peck and Wiggins (2006) find that adding tactile cues to an ad, such as a feather or a pamphlet requesting donations that make the

consumer feel good, increase both persuasion and the likelihood of donation. Gorn *et al.* (1997) demonstrate that colours affect different reaction to ads, either feelings of relaxation (e.g. blue hues) or excitement (e.g. red hues). Park and Young (1986) suggest that music can trigger affective feelings or mood and act as a peripheral persuasion cue in advertising. Moreover, MacInnis and Park (1991) demonstrate that music heightens consumer involvement in an ad and stimulates the processing of advertised message and past emotion-laden experiences. Research also shows that when music is congruent with the ad message, brand and message recall is enhanced (Kellaris *et al.*, 1993).

Research has also tried to identify how sensory imagery affects brand evaluations and how consumers use extrinsic cues to infer product attributes. In an investigation of how German and French music influence wine selection, North *et al.* (1999) find that music activates wine shoppers related knowledge and the strong national associations have a positive effect on their product choices. Another study conducted by Areni and Kim (1993) shows that music generates associations regarding price, status and class, in that consumers purchase more expensive wines when classic music is playing in the store. As noted by Yorkston and Menon (2004), phonetic symbolism acts as a sensory cue that enables consumers to infer product attributes in the same way as a brand name. Research on visual imagery, which focuses on the inclusion of a product image in a package, demonstrates that it can be used as an extrinsic cue to communicate information about the product's sensory characteristics (Pavio, 1986). Underwood and Klein (2002) demonstrate that product imagery on packaging impacts on consumers' evaluations of both packaging and brands.

As Keller and Lehman (2006) note product experiences are multi-sensory-based and impact on brand equity in several ways. It can be argued that the way the brand expresses itself to consumers deliver a brand promise by attaching sensory associations to a product or a service. These associations are able to enhance the intrinsic characteristics of products or services (e.g. the smooth sound of a Mercedes-Benz door closing, which is associated with a premium product), or create a distinctive sensorial identity (e.g. the raw sound of a Harley Davidson bike which gives you the feeling of being wild and free). Human senses therefore act as retrieval cues when exposed to

proximal, sensory brand-stimuli that are strong and positive enough to be reactivated through sensorial strategies. In this regard, consumers recognise brands unconsciously based on their brand sensuality.

In this thesis, the definition of brand sensuality is grounded on sensory experiences based on pleasure stimuli and input perceived by the human senses, when consumers experience appealing products and services in their value-generating processes. Moreover, brand sensuality is both transactional and relational-based and results from an interactive and personalized relationship between the brand and the consumer, in which the five human senses have a central role in creating and delivering unique and meaningful multi-sensory brand-experiences.

2.4 Conclusion

Consumer-based brand equity has been addressed as a significant construct in theory and practice for a long time in explaining how consumers perceive and experience brands. Nevertheless, the research in this domain is still sparse and requires more attention. Earlier models on brand equity have focused heavily on how consumers perceive, relate to and evaluate brands by investigating knowledge structures such as brand awareness, image and personality (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) and brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

More recently, researchers have argued that is important to consider how brand experiences impact on consumer-based brand equity and to analyze its moderate effect on building strong brands (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). In this theoretical context, sensory dimensions are also taken into account in creating meaningful brand experiences, but are not explored enough in considering its effect on brand experiences and the way it impacts on consumer-based brand equity. Furthermore, it is commonly accepted that brand experiences increase interactions and emotional ties between brands and consumers and that consumers are looking for brands that provide them with memorable and unique experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999).

As discussed in Essay 1, the significance of sensory dimensions raises the question of how firms can create and deliver meaningful and personalized experiences and thus enhance brand image in the long run. With the emergence of sensory marketing (e.g. Essay 2), it is argued that brand sensuality could be seen as a concept that could contribute to position a brand as image in the human mind. Moreover, as stressed in Essay 3, there is a need to investigate the direct and indirect impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity that could better explain the influence of the human senses on how consumers perceive and experience brands as image.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As an introduction to the methodology chapter, a brief presentation on the scientific approach of this thesis will be presented, as well as an account for the research strategies followed in the three Essays. Thereafter, a general discussion is made over the undertaken pre-understanding and literature study process followed by a detailed description of the methods used in the empirical study and a discussion in terms of validity and reliability. Finally, a brief note is given regarding the overview of the research process.

3.2 Scientific approach

Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.1) state that “*All social scientists approach their subject via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated*”. In this thesis, pragmatism guides the scientific approach allowing me, as a researcher, to verify and make generalizations deriving from obtained knowledge, either objectively through literature review or subjectively through my experience as a consultant. Moreover, by accepting a continuum between objectivity and subjectivity, grounded on a holistic form of pragmatism (Baert, 2005), I was allowed to move back and forth between theory and anecdotal evidence. In fact, pragmatism advocates a more broadly thinking in social science (Baert, 2005) and avoids the conflict between rational explanations of the social world (objectivist approach) and its interpretation (subjectivist approach). Furthermore, it allows the researcher to move away from the dominant and incompatible epistemologies of positivism and constructivism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Branding and marketing research is dominated by a deductive logic approach, which “*represents the most common view of the nature of the relationship between theory and research*” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 11). According to this logic, researchers move from what is known about a particular domain and its theoretical considerations to

deducing a hypothesis that will be further subjected to empirical testing. On the other hand, inductive approach starts with observation of individual cases from which generalizable inferences are derived. In a broad view, a deductive approach guides quantitative researches whereas an inductive approach is typically associated with qualitative researches (Neuman, 2000). In this thesis, a deductive research strategy is chosen to capture the rational and subjective, observed knowledge.

The adoption of a deductive scientific approach facilitated the process of exploring what was known about the phenomenon studied and contributed to build a consistent theoretical framework, which is presented in Essay 1 and 2. Moreover, the refinement of the existing theory along the research process provided the investigation with a strong deductive starting point, in order to develop and to test a new construct discussed in Essay 3. By interpreting both theoretical and empirical frameworks, it became possible to discover an underlying pattern that highlights the importance of brand sensuality as a key antecedent to consumer-based brand equity.

3.3 Research strategy

Research strategies concern the general orientation when conducting a research, either by applying quantitative or qualitative methods. Quantitative methods emphasize a deductive approach between theory and research with a focus on theories testing, and consider social reality as external and objective. On the other hand, qualitative methods entail an inductive approach with an accent on generation of ideas, and embody social reality as a constantly shifting entity (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Moreover, it is commonly accepted that the context of the study determines the research strategy and that it should match the proposed research problem (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004).

In this thesis, Essays 1 and 2 are entirely conceptual in nature and are developed through the context of discovery. In this regard, these Essays entail a deductive approach from the theoretical framework, providing a detailed review of theoretically relevant work from marketing and branding in the last decades. Furthermore, the two

Essays discuss and analyze significant branding constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality in relation to consumer-based brand equity and suggest a strategic sensorial branding approach as a means of solving the theoretical dilemma in contemporary marketing models. Departing from a framework for analysis presented in Essay 2, the researcher derives to a more focused and structured theory which is further subjected to empirical testing in a B2C context. The results of the quantitative study are presented in Essay 3 and significant statistical generalizations are accomplished.

3.4 Pre-understanding

My activity as an international marketing consultant awoke my curiosity about innovative ways of building strong brands in highly competitive markets. I remember that my senses were dazzled when I visited some stores and entertainment places across Europe and I got intrigued about the role of human senses on shopper experiences. In 2005, the book “*Brand Sense*”, authored by Martin Lindstrom, was published and I read it with the enthusiasm of a practitioner seduced by a more hedonic and experiential branding perspective. Further interesting readings followed, such as “*Marketing Aesthetics*” (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997) and “*Emotional Branding*” (Gobé, 2001), as well as some trending articles published in the international press about experiential marketing. Consequently, my interest on this research area grew rapidly and later on I decided to propose myself as PhD candidate. I was accepted in Oporto University in 2006 and I have attended doctoral classes during two years. In 2007, I have participated in ESOMAR Fragrance Conference that was held in Paris (France), which provided me with information about new trends, consumers insights and challenges for marketers in defining, measuring and evaluating the role of fragrances in branding. Furthermore, between 2007 and 2013, I have attended several conferences and seminars about marketing and branding, either in Portugal or other European countries.

Having a wide experience as branding consultant and creative director in retail, fashion, cosmetics, wines, pharmaceutical and aluminum systems industries offers me the opportunity to collect data on real contexts, to learn about brand managers’ challenges

and expectations and to generate a broad overview of issues concerning brand-building process in contemporary society. This solid business experience facilitated my understanding of the research problem and helped me to develop the thesis from a scientific point of view.

3.5 Literature study

The beginning of the literature study process focused on searching for books and articles, in order to start building a consistent theoretical framework in regard to the proposed research problem. Therefore, as a starting point, I read about marketing and branding theories such as relationship marketing, the service-dominant logic, transactional and relationship branding strategies, and sensory marketing. Hence, books such as *“In search of a new logic for marketing: Foundations of contemporary theory”* from Grönroos (2007), *“Sensory Marketing”* from Krishna (2010) and *“Sensory Marketing”* from Hultén *et al.* (2009), provided me with important insights of how a service-dominant logic could theoretically be linked to a sensory marketing approach.

Thereafter, I felt the need to investigate deeper on the existing theoretical and empirical studies about human senses and multi-sensory brand-experiences as drivers of brand value. To achieve this goal, Oporto University online database was used to look for articles published in the last ten years on those issues. From the data research, it was possible to conclude that there was a growing field of empirical studies on the sensory dimensions of brands applied mainly to one or two senses individually. Nevertheless, research on brand experiences was very scarce and only three relevant empirical and conceptual articles were found (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2010; Hultén, 2011). My first Essay, entitled *“Sensorial brand strategies for value co-creation”*, derives from the first stage of the literature study in this thesis.

The next step consisted in searching for articles which accounted for the value co-creation process following a service-dominant logic. The main objective was to understand how brands create brand value with consumers along the value-generating process and how can it be related to a sensory branding framework. Finally, a detailed

literature study was made on traditional key antecedents to consumer-based brand equity, such as brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience. In this regard, several relevant articles were identified and analyze, providing a solid basis to elaborate a framework for analysis, which is proposed in the second Essay entitled “*Sensory branding: Towards an integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence*”.

In general, my literature study focused on leading scientific journal, such as the Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Retailing, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Marketing Management, European Management Journal, Journal of Product and Brand Management, Advances in Consumer Research, European Business Review, Journal of Brand Management, among others.

3.6 Empirical study

3.6.1 Methods description

As discussed in Chapter 2, the review of relevant literature on branding and marketing shows that a majority of studies on consumer-based brand equity are conceptual and only a minority has investigated CBBE empirically. Consequently, there is a need for future research on the antecedents of CBBE encompassing a quantitative research strategy. In this regard, a questionnaire design appears to be the most appropriate means to answer the overarching research problem of this thesis “*Is the construct of brand sensuality an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context?*” together with the three stated research questions.

Hence, following the framework for analysis proposed in Essay 2, an empirical study was undertaken with the collaboration of ACP – the Portuguese Automobile Association, allowing the researcher to use a sample of real consumers. Research in this domain has mainly focused on student samples, which tends to create some investigation bias. Some exceptions are Pappu *et al.* (2005) and Shamin and Butt’s

(2013) studies conducted on cars and televisions and mobile handsets, respectively. Moreover, a great body of empirical studies on automobile industry accounts for the study of brand personality influence on consumer-based brand equity (Branaghan and Hildebrand, 2011; Maehle and Supphellen, 2010; Ramaseshan and Tsao, 2007; Rojas-Mendez *et al.*, 2004), thus neglecting other branding constructs, such as brand relationship, brand sensuality and brand experience. Hence, to our knowledge this research is the first to fully explain how consumers perceive and experience car brands and the significance of brand sensuality on creating a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity.

Firstly, a standardized questionnaire (Appendix I) was designed as a survey instrument to measure the impact of brand personality, brand relationship, brand sensuality and brand experience on consumer-based brand equity. The questions of the survey are based on the literature review and on specific automobile industry characteristics collected during interviews conducted with Portuguese marketing managers of Volvo, Seat, Toyota and Chevrolet brands. Moreover, respondents are asked to answer the survey questions keeping in mind the brand of the car they own or that they usually drive.

Secondly, a pre-test was carried out with randomly selected car owners in northern Portugal. Thereafter, the survey was revised and improved based on the feedback from a sample of twenty car owners. Finally, a field survey was conducted online in cooperation with ACP - the Portuguese Automobile Association - using a convenience sample of car owners, which corresponds to the database of associates of ACP.

The questionnaire consisted of six sections. The first section deals with the measurement of brand relationship with a six-item scale adopted from the work of McAlexander *et al.* (2002), Maehle and Supphellen (2010) and Matzler *et al.* (2011). Departing from the work of Yoo and Donthu (2001) the second section deals with the measurement of the consumer-based brand equity, using a seven-item scale. In the third and fourth section, a nine-item scale to measure brand sensuality and a five-item scale to measure brand experience were adapted from Brakus *et al.* (2009) and combined with

new items proposed by the researcher. The fifth section deals with the measurement of brand personality using a seven-item scale following Aaker (1997). The items for each construct are reported in the Appendix II. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement level towards each item of five sections on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by “much inadequate” (=1) to “much adequate” (=5) for brand personality. The same 5-point Likert scale was used for brand relationship, consumer-based brand equity, brand sensuality and brand experience anchored by “strongly disagree” (=1) to “strongly agree” (=5). Finally, the sixth section gathers standard demographic and lifestyle information, using a categorical scale with 8 items, namely gender, occupation, education level, marital status, residential area, age, household, and interest areas.

A total of 679 surveys were answered online across several Portuguese cities in August 2013. Data analysis was carried out in three steps. Firstly, data was examined for missing values and potential errors in data entry. Given the large sample, surveys with missing values and outliers were removed from the initial data and 482 surveys were coded (Appendix III). The presented quantitative research adopts a convenience sample of car owners. The sample shows that 78 percent of respondents are male and 22 percent are female. The average age is 43.5 years old. The great majority is employed (74 percent), holds an university degree (59 percent), is married (53 percent) and the household average is 2.7 members. Most of respondents enjoy travelling (74 percent) and are fond of music (62 percent) and technology (61 percent).

Finally, the answers from each question of the questionnaire were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) following AMOS (version 21). In opposition to traditional method of multiple regressions, SEM offers a set of versatile and effective tools that allows researchers to simultaneously analyze the overall model fit and to estimate the direct and indirect effect of the predictor’s variables in a causal model (Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Hair *et al.*, 2009).

The findings of the empirical research, which are discussed in Essay 3, account for the positive impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based based equity. Nevertheless, it was found that brand experience mediates the impact in the value-generating process for

the all the analyzed branding constructs, i.e brand personality, brand relationship and brand sensuality. Hence, a final model is proposed (Figure 1) as an outcome of the aforementioned empirical study.

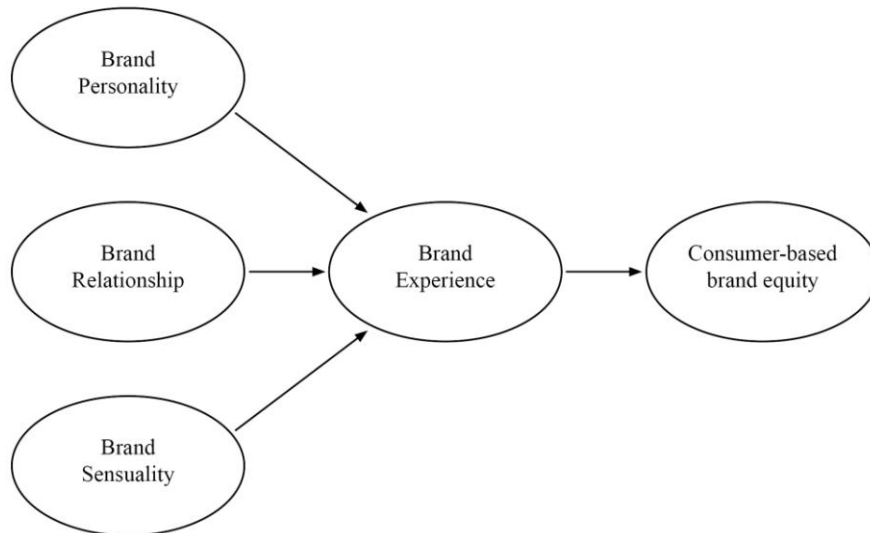


Figure 1: Final Model.

3.6.2 Research quality

Validity and reliability play a central role when assessing the research quality of the aforementioned empirical study. Whereas validity concerns the integrity of the conclusions that are drawn from a specific research, reliability addresses the question of whether the findings are repeatable (Fowler, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

In quantitative research, validity is discussed in terms of content, face, construct and external validity (Buckingham and Saunders, 2004). Content validity refers to the degree of how appropriately a test represents the domain that is intended to be measured (Salkind, 2007). Since the degree of validity can only be assessed by knowledgeable people on the researched domain, a group of marketing lecturers was selected to give their comments on the pilot questionnaire and thus guarantee the survey content validity. Therefore, after some improvements based on their comments, a new survey

was elaborated. The next step, involving face validity, was handled by a pre-test carried out with randomly selected car owners in northern Portugal. Face validity refers to the “obviousness” of the purpose of the test and estimates the degree to which a measure is clear even to naïve respondents (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004). Although the results of the pre-test accounted for an high face validity, some improvements were introduced in order to increase the “obviousness” of the surveys. On the other hand, construct validity was assured through careful operationalization of the brand association dimensions based on extant theories, so as to guarantee that each construct is accurately measured and interpreted. Finally, external validity handling with the generalization of findings was also achieved by selecting a convenience sample of real consumers, i.e. members of ACP – the Portuguese Automobile Association.

Reliability addresses the consistency and stability of research findings. In quantitative research strategies, it assesses the extent to which multiple researchers can arrive at similar findings if the research is conducted again using identical procedures (Given, 2008).

In this empirical research, reliability was firstly obtained by dividing the questionnaire into sections, which allows consumers to focus on each theme at a time and avoids boredom. As a result, missing values in the surveys were minimized. Secondly, sensitive questions as income were not included in the questionnaire, and were replaced by questions related to lifestyle. Consequently, the number of complete and valid surveys increased. Finally, the anonymous standardized on-line survey ensured that all respondents filled the questionnaire in a similar situation. Moreover, the effects of surrounding environment were minimized due to the limited time the survey was conducted on-line, i.e., fifteen days during August 2013.

3.7 Overview of the research process

My research project began in 2008 and since then it has been very rewarding to contribute for the enhancement of branding knowledge in this area. In June 2010, I attended the 39th EMAC Annual Conference, which motto was “The 6 Senses: The

Essentials of Marketing” that took place in Copenhagen Business School in Denmark. During this conference, I presented a poster entitled “*The impact of sensory brand experiences on loyalty and switching behaviors*”. Also in June 2010, I organized the first international conference on sensory marketing, which was held in Lisbon (Portugal) and joined worldwide academics and practitioners on debate about sensory branding and marketing. During 2010, I was invited to share my academic and practitioner experience in several Portuguese conferences and seminars, such as the seminar about “Sensory Marketing” in Escola Superior de Comunicação Social (Lisboa), the Conference “Powered by Creativity” organized by Exponor (Matosinhos) and the Conference “Marketing in the point of sale” promoted by Distribuição Hoje (Lisboa).

Following my collaboration with marketing schools, I have participated in January 2011 in a seminar about sensory marketing organized by IPAM (Matosinhos, Portugal). In March 2011, I have submitted the paper “*Multi-sensory brand-experience: towards a strategic sensorial brand approach*” to the “Thought Leaders International Conference in Brand Management” (Lugano, Switzerland), which was accepted. Therefore, I attended the conference as a speaker in the Sensory Brand Experience Track.

During 2012, my research focused on writing the second paper entitled “*Sensory branding: Towards an integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence*”. In March 2012, I was invited to speak about sensory branding as one of the marketing trends in XXI century in “Atualiza-te” Conference, which was held in Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal). In October 2012, I attended the 8th Global Brand Conference held in Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Oporto (Portugal).

Finally, in August 2013 I conducted a survey online with the collaboration of ACP - the Portuguese Automobile Association, as part of my empirical research. This survey led to the third paper, entitled “*Brand Sensuality: An antecedent to consumer-based brand equity*”. In the same year, I co-authored a chapter about “Sensory Marketing” with Professor Bertil Hultén, which will be published in the book “*Novos Horizontes do Marketing*”, a compilation about marketing trends organized by Professor Carlos Melo Brito and Professor Paulo Lencastre.



2008/2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	 Poster in 39th EMAC Conference	 Paper in Thought Leaders Conference in Brand Management			
Literature Review		Essay 1 Literature Review Paper writing	Essay 2 Literature Review Paper writing		
				Essay 3 - Survey, Standardized questionnaire - Operationalization of constructs - SPSS & SEM Data analysis - Paper writing	
				QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH	2014 Thesis Defense

Figure 2: Overview of the research process.

4. SUMMARY OF ESSAYS

In this chapter, a compilation of the Essays will be presented and a brief summary of each Essay will be given. The summary begins with the rationale of the study, the research questions and the aims of the Essay. Thereafter, the theoretical framework is accounted for and the empirical study and research design is briefly mentioned, together with the findings of the Essay. Finally, each summary includes a note on the theoretical and managerial contributions. The full version of the Essays is included in the end of this chapter.

4.1 Essay 1

Rodrigues, C., B. Hultén e C. Brito (2011), “Sensorial brand strategies for value co-creation”, *Journal Innovative Marketing*, Vol. 7, N° 2, pp. 40-47.

Keywords: sensory marketing model, branding, human senses, sensorial strategies

Inspired by service logic, an assumption is that the value of a brand emerges when interactions occur through the consumer’s multi-sensory brand-experiences in the value-generating process, creating a symbiosis between individual and brand. This view contrasts with the axiom of traditional marketing, that self-interest and competition are the drivers of value creation and is in accordance with relationship marketers who believe that it is mutual cooperation that delivers value. Furthermore, the significance of the human senses relating to seeing, sound, smelling, touching and tasting, where individuals perceive and experience goods and services as brand as image raises the issue of how companies can create and deliver meaningful and powerful personalized experiences.

The paper is entirely conceptual in nature and it is developed through the context of discovery. A review of theoretically relevant work from marketing, branding and consumer psychology is presented and it is demonstrated that in literature there is a gap with respect to how consumers perceive, as opposed to actually experience a brand as image through human senses. The article discusses how to delve into the consumers

mind and treat them in a more personal manner through differentiating and expressing a brand. Moreover, it discusses the concept of sensorial strategies in contrast to transactional strategies and relational strategies and considers how a sensory marketing model can be regarded as an alternative to conventional marketing models.

The contribution of the Essay is a conceptual understanding based on theory development in proposing a definition of sensorial strategies within a strategic sensorial brand approach. This should be seen as a practical means of solving the theoretical dilemma in contemporary marketing models. This approach integrates the human senses with branding and marketing theories, so as to consider the deliberate involvement of the human senses to construct an image of a brand, based on individual perceptions and sensory experiences in purchase and consumption processes.

4.2 Essay 2

Rodrigues, C., B. Hultén e C. Brito (2013), “Sensory branding: Towards an integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence”.

Keywords: conceptual paper, propositions, sensory branding model, consumer-based brand equity, business performance

Brand equity models share the perspective that brand equity takes place in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1993), which highlights the importance of brands as *operant* resources in marketing strategy and consumers as active co-creators of brand value (Merz *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the branding literature explains the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity (Pappu *et al.*, 2005) and suggests the incorporation of some sub-dimensions of brand associations, such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), brand relationship (Blackston, 1992; Jones, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006) and brand experience (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) as antecedents to brand equity. However, the extent to which some of these sub-dimensions *interdependently* and *independently*

influence consumer-based brand equity has not been fully explored and is proposed in the literature as a future research direction.

The main contribution of this Essay is that it proposes a conceptual and integrated model within a sensory branding framework, encompassing the concepts of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality as antecedents to consumer-based brand equity. In this context, a comprehensive review of previous research in the marketing and branding literature is conducted and a framework for analysis is proposed for future empirical testing.

An important theoretical implication is that the proposed sensory branding framework brings together disparate constructs into a more cohesive integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence. In this regard, marketing scholars are allowed to rethink each of the constructs separately and focus on the relationships between the constructs and the consumer-based brand equity. Another theoretical implication is that brand sensuality, as a construct, is proposed for the first time as key driver of brand value in the focus of the service provision.

A managerial implication is that brand managers might benefit from adopting a sensory branding framework, so as to enhance consumer-based brand equity and achieve business performance. Moreover, the framework allows brand managers to appeal to consumers' human senses through sensations and sensory experiences in positioning the brand as an image. This will facilitate firms and their brands to express their personality, manage relationships with consumers and build meaningful and memorable brand experiences, as well as expressing brand sensuality.

4.3 Essay 3

Rodrigues, C., B. Hultén, C. Brito e V. Martins (2013), "Brand Sensuality: An antecedent to consumer-based brand equity".

Keywords: Empirical research paper, brand sensuality, consumer-based brand equity, sensory branding

Consumer-based brand equity has been addressed as a significant construct in theory and practice for a long time in explaining how consumers perceive and experience brands. Earlier models on brand equity have focused heavily on how consumers perceive, relate to and evaluate brands by investigating knowledge structures such as brand awareness, image and personality (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) and brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Within the emergence of sensory marketing, it has been argued that brand sensuality as a concept could contribute to create a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity.

In the literature a theoretical gap has been identified concerning how the concept of brand sensuality could be seen as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. Moreover, there is a need to investigate the impact of brand sensuality in relation to brand experiences and measure its impact on CBBE in comparison to brand personality and brand relationship. In order to fill the existing theoretical gap, the present empirical study proposes brand sensuality as an antecedent of CBBE and raises the following research question: *Is the construct of brand sensuality an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context?*

The data was collected from 482 users of car brands in collaboration with ACP – the Automobile Portuguese Association, using a convenience sampling technique. Data was analyzed using structural equation model to test the proposed relationships in the research model.

The empirical findings support the research question that brand sensuality has a positive effect, through the mediation of brand experience, on consumer-brand based brand equity. Moreover, the direct relationship between brand sensuality and brand experience yields the highest standardized estimates when compared to brand personality and brand

relationship constructs, which accounts for the significance of brand sensuality as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity.

The main contribution of this Essay is that it proposes a definition of the construct of brand sensuality within a sensorial brand approach. Furthermore, it analyses and explains the impact of brand sensuality in relation to brand experience and measures its impact on consumer-based brand equity.

An important theoretical implication is that this research contributes to our understanding of the antecedents of consumer-based brand equity by exploring the direct and indirect influence of the brand personality, brand relationship, brand sensuality and brand experience on CBBE. Additionally, the research enriches CBBE measurement by incorporating brand sensuality measures, which has not been accomplished before in the branding and marketing literature.

The findings of the research have important implications for marketers, in particular for those who look for long-term brand success and innovative marketing techniques to interact with consumers in a more personalized manner. Developing an unique brand sensuality based on sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, will allow brands to engage with consumers emotionally when they experience products and services using their senses.

5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Research problem

The chosen methodology of this thesis stresses the significance and positive impact of sensory dimensions through brand sensuality in relation to brand experiences within a value-generating process. Moreover, it also accounts for the need to fulfill a research gap in contemporary branding and sensory marketing literature concerning how sensory dimensions contribute to enhance consumer-based brand equity when consumers experience products and services.

As stated in the introduction chapter, the insufficient knowledge on brand sensuality and its relation with consumer-based brand equity gave rise to the formulation of the overarching research problem: *“Is the construct of brand sensuality an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context?”*

Based on the overarching research problem, I have concluded that brand sensuality, as a construct, can be seen as a key antecedent to consumer-based brand equity following a consumer-centric perspective. Furthermore, I argue that brand sensuality plays a central role in creating positive brand experiences and thereby stronger brand image in the long term. Hence, firms might benefit from adopting brand sensuality, based on sight, sound, touch, smell and taste in relation to different sensory dimensions in a B2C context to create brand value.

5.2 Main conclusions

Branding literature shares the perspective that brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, as concepts, are the most relevant antecedents to consumer-based brand equity. However, a consumer-centric perspective put in evidence the need to rethink how brand value is created within a sensory branding framework. Deriving from the aforementioned research problem of this thesis, three research questions were raised

in order to explore, analyze and explain the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context.

5.2.1 Research question 1

The first research question of this thesis consists in asking “*From a strategic point of view, how can brands express their sensuality to consumers in the value-generating process?*” Inspired by a service-dominant logic, I conclude that brand sensuality can only be expressed to consumers using sensorial strategies along the value-generating process in multiple encounters, such as products, communication, events and points-of-sale. This approach extends our knowledge of existing branding and marketing theories, so as to consider the involvement of human senses to construct a brand as image in a B2C context, based on individual perceptions and experiences in different purchase and consumption processes.

It should be noted that the current marketing and branding literature offers no clear definition of sensorial strategies. In order to solve this theoretical dilemma, I define sensorial strategies as “*an emotional and cognitive strategic approach developed by a firm or a brand in order to establish, maintain and enhance multiple and profitable relationships. This approach follows a service logic that delivers congruent consumer value and brand image with respect to a certain human sense or senses in the consumer’s mind*” (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2011, p. 44).

5.2.2 Research question 2

The second research question of this thesis consists in asking “*Which is the relationship between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity within a sensory branding framework?*” The chosen methodology of this thesis allows me to conclude that brand sensuality, as a construct, is a key driver of brand value in the focus of service provision. Given this view, I propose the integration of brand sensuality, as a sensory-based construct, into a conceptual framework with regard to the significance of sensory dimensions in the brand-building and value-generating process. In this regard, brand

sensuality is proposed as central to creating strong and powerful brands in a B2C context.

5.2.3 Research question 3

The third research question of this thesis consists in asking “*From an empirical point of view, does brand sensuality impact directly or indirectly on consumer-brand equity?*” The empirical findings allow me to conclude that brand sensuality impacts directly on brand experiences and indirectly on consumer-based brand equity. Moreover, the direct relationship between brand sensuality and brand experience yields the highest standardized estimates when compared to brand personality and brand relationship constructs, which accounts for the significance of brand sensuality as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. These findings yield new insights on how firms can apply brand sensuality in order to create a positive brand experience and enhance the perceived value-in-use in a B2C context.

5.3 Contributions

This thesis aims at exploring, analyzing and explaining the theoretical and empirical relationships between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity within the brand value creation process in a B2C context. Hence, it provides a number of theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions, which will be further discussed in detail.

5.3.1 Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical point a view, this thesis conceptualizes and proposes brand sensuality as a construct in explaining the role of sensory dimensions in the enhancement of the perceived value-in-use as a result of a multi-sensory brand-experience. This extends our knowledge of existing branding and marketing theories, so as to consider the deliberate involvement of human senses to construct an image of a brand, based on individual perceptions and experiences in different purchase and consumption processes.

Furthermore, this thesis analyses and discusses the significance of brand sensuality construct within a sensory branding framework and challenges both scholars and marketers to rethink brands as dynamic entities imbued of sensory dimensions, which constantly appeal to consumers' senses along the value-generating process in multiple encounters, such as products, communication, events and points-of-sale. It should be noted that brand sensuality, as a construct, is integrated for the first time into a consumer-based brand-equity context, along with traditional branding constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, identified in literature as key drivers of brand value. Furthermore, this thesis is the first to explore the direct and indirect impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity.

Another theoretical contribution is that this thesis provides the first definition of brand sensuality, i.e. *“The firm’s ability to seduce and engage consumers emotionally through the involvement of the five human senses, when consumers experience goods and services as a result of multi-sensory brand-experiences”*. This definition contributes to enhance branding knowledge on how brands can deliver value propositions based on brand sensuality and thus differentiate and position a brand as image in the human mind in the long term.

Finally, this thesis provides empirical evidence that brand sensuality is one of the key antecedents to consumer-based brand equity through the mediation of brand experience. The findings suggest that brand sensuality plays an important role in facilitating a holistic interaction between brands and consumers who look for sensory and experiential benefits in the value-generating process. Following this perspective, I propose brand sensuality as central in creating a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in the long term.

5.3.2 Methodological contributions

From a methodological point of view, this thesis combines existing scales with adapted or new scales on constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality in order to measure their direct and indirect impact on

consumer-based brand equity. This method facilitates the process of explaining how consumers perceive and experience car brands in the value-generating process and allows to measure disparate branding constructs within the same framework for analysis presented in Essay 2. The proposed scale, consisting of 24 items, is straightforward and easy to administrate in a B2C context for different product categories. Moreover, the scale is internally consistent and has successfully passed reliability and validity tests.

Another important methodological contribution is that the present thesis enriches consumer-based brand equity measurement by incorporating brand sensuality measures, which accounts for the multidimensionality of CBBE as previously suggested by Pappu *et al.* (2005). In this regard, it should be noted that the brand experience scale proposed by Brakus *et al.* (2009) was split in two parts: one accounting for the experiential dimensions measures (brand experience scale) and another for the sensory dimensions measures (brand sensuality scale). Moreover, the proposed brand sensuality scale incorporates some new items in order to measure brand sensuality with more accuracy, following the theoretical framework presented in Essay 2.

Finally, the empirical research uses a sample of real consumers to measure the impact of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity, thus avoiding some bias in research as a result of non-student samples. The empirical study was conducted online with the collaboration of ACP – the Portuguese Automobile Association during August 2013. To my knowledge this is the first study on car brands, which adopts a multidimensional approach and incorporates brand sensuality as a construct within a sensory-branding framework. In fact, previous empirical studies on automobile industry focus predominantly on the impact of brand personality on consumer-based brand equity and use student samples as measuring tool.

5.3.3 Managerial contributions

A managerial implication is that brand managers might benefit from adopting a sensory branding framework in order to create brand value. The findings of the empirical study

yield new insights into the significance of adopting brand sensuality, based on sight, sound, touch, smell and taste in relation to different sensory dimensions in a B2C context. By appealing to consumers' human senses through sensations and sensory experiences, brand managers are allowed to position more efficiently the brand as an image in the human mind and thus enhance the consumer-based brand equity.

To date, branding strategies have been more or less limited to standard marketing-mix techniques, in which the creation of strong brand personalities through advertising and loyalty programs for enhancing customer-brand relationships are in the focus of marketing strategy. Brand sensuality in a sensory branding framework opens endless possibilities to contemporary brand management by highlighting the need to engage consumers emotionally through unique sensory dimensions and in creating memorable multi-sensory brand experiences.

By defining consisting and appealing brand sensuality, a firm will be able to seduce its consumers through different sensory dimensions by using the five senses when they experience products and services. This may require that marketers should not only define how the brand behaves or relates to consumers, but also how the brand should express its sensuality to consumers through sensory dimensions applied to products, communications, events and points-of-sale, either individually or combined.

The shift into a more customer-centric perspective in the brand-building and value-generating process implies that marketers recognize the importance of brand sensuality in creating positive brand experiences and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity. By recognizing the significance of brand sensuality as a key antecedent to CBBE, marketers will be able to adopt a more emotional-based brand strategy in order to differentiate and position a brand in the human mind.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Research on the relationships between brand sensuality and consumer-based brand equity is still in its infancy and offers exciting avenues of research. One of the

limitations of this thesis is that it only analyzes the impact of brand sensuality on CBBE for car brands. Thus, it might be important to investigate this issue on different product categories in a B2C context. Moreover, investigation in a B2B context is also recommended in order to understand the impact of brand sensuality both on products and services.

Another important limitation refers to the fact that the empirical study was made in Portugal, which may account for some cultural bias questions. It might be interesting to replicate this investigation for example in a northern European country in order to cross empirical findings with a southern European country as Portugal. By analyzing the empirical results in two different countries from a cultural point of view, will allow to better understand the impact of brand sensuality on CBBE across cultures.

Another avenue of research refers to need of investigation in each sensory dimension in relation to brand sensuality, i.e. how each human sense contributes to express the brand sensuality and thus enhance consumer-based brand equity. Moreover, it would be useful to conduct research on how brand sensuality affects positively or negatively CBBE in different encounters, such as products, communication, events and points-of-sale.

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APPENDIX I

Questionário para um estudo sobre Branding Sensorial

INSTRUÇÕES PARA PREENCHER O QUESTIONÁRIO

Este questionário faz parte de uma investigação da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto sobre o setor automóvel e sobre o branding sensorial. Pedimos a sua colaboração e empenho para responder ao questionário, o que muito contribuirá para a qualidade final do estudo. O tempo de resposta é de cerca de 10/15 minutos. Sublinhe-se que todos os dados são anónimos e confidenciais, sendo utilizados apenas a nível agregado e exclusivamente para o referido estudo.

AGRADECEMOS MUITO A SUA COLABORAÇÃO.

Responda às seguintes questões, assinalando com uma cruz a célula respectiva ou escrevendo o número ou o texto adequado.

1. **Possui automóvel** ou conduz um automóvel de um familiar próximo? ☐ Sim ☐ Não

SE NÃO POSSUIR AUTOMÓVEL OU NÃO CONDUZIR O AUTOMÓVEL DE UM FAMILIAR PRÓXIMO O SEU QUESTIONÁRIO TERMINOU AQUI. OBRIGADO PELA SUA COLABORAÇÃO.

2. Qual é a **marca do seu automóvel**? _____ Qual é o **modelo**? _____

3. Quais foram os **motivos** que o(a) levaram a optar por essa marca? (indique **duas respostas no máximo**)

☐ É uma das minhas marcas favoritas

☐ Preço

☐ Conveniência

☐ Qualidade

☐ Design

☐ Conforto

☐ Não existe outra alternativa

☐ Outra. Qual? _____

4. Quando nos relacionamos com uma pessoa podemos criar fortes laços afetivos ou simplesmente não estabelecer qualquer relação emocional com essa pessoa. **Se o seu automóvel fosse uma pessoa, qual seria a expressão que melhor descreve aquilo que sente pela marca do seu automóvel?** Indique apenas **uma** expressão.

- ☐ sinto-me apaixonado(a) pela marca do meu automóvel.
- ☐ a marca do meu automóvel é como se fosse o meu melhor amigo.
- ☐ mantenho apenas uma relação casual com a marca do meu automóvel.
- ☐ não tenho qualquer relação emocional com a marca do meu automóvel.

5. Leia com atenção cada uma das questões e **indique o seu grau de concordância / discordância** em relação às seguintes afirmações. **Responda a todas as questões.**

Discordo muito 1	Discordo 2	Nem concordo nem discordo 3	Concordo 4	Concordo muito 5
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	1	2	3	4	5
1. Conheço pessoas maravilhosas que possuem a mesma marca de automóveis que eu tenho.					
2. Existe um sentimento de partilha de gostos e ideias entre as pessoas que possuem a mesma marca de automóveis que eu tenho.					
3. A marca do meu automóvel preocupa-se com a minha opinião.					
4. Optei pela marca do meu automóvel para me distinguir das outras pessoas.					
5. As outras pessoas podem dizer que tipo de pessoa sou baseando-se na marca do meu automóvel.					
6. A marca do meu automóvel reflete a pessoa que sou.					
7. Sou capaz de reconhecer a marca do meu automóvel de entre as marcas concorrentes.					
8. Algumas características da marca do meu automóvel vêm-me à cabeça rapidamente.					
9. Consigo lembrar-me facilmente do logótipo da marca do meu automóvel.					
10. Considero que sou leal à marca do meu automóvel.					
11. Se tivesse de adquirir um novo automóvel, a marca atual seria a minha primeira escolha.					
12. Estou disposto(a) a pagar um preço mais elevado pela marca do meu automóvel numa próxima aquisição.					
13. Recomendo aos meus amigos a marca do meu automóvel.					

6. A visão, a audição, o paladar, o tato e o olfato funcionam como sensores em relação ao mundo que nos rodeia. Da seguinte lista, **indique em que aspetos a marca do seu automóvel apela aos seus sentidos?** Se a resposta for positiva, pode seleccionar entre 1 a 4 aspetos. Se a resposta for negativa selecione “nenhum”.

- ☐ A marca do meu automóvel apela aos meus sentidos nos **produtos** (ex: modelos de automóveis)
- ☐ A marca do meu automóvel apela aos meus sentidos na **comunicação** (ex: publicidade, sítio da marca, etc)
- ☐ A marca do meu automóvel apela aos meus sentidos nos **eventos** (ex: eventos organizados ou patrocinados pela marca)
- ☐ A marca do meu automóvel apela aos meus sentidos nos **pontos de venda** (ex: showrooms, concessionários da marca, etc)
- ☐ A marca do meu automóvel não apela a nenhum dos meus sentidos.

7. Leia com atenção cada uma das questões e **indique o seu grau de concordância / discordância** em relação às seguintes afirmações. **Responda a todas as questões.**

Discordo muito 1	Discordo 2	Nem concordo nem discordo 3	Concordo 4	Concordo muito 5
---------------------	---------------	--------------------------------	---------------	---------------------

	1	2	3	4	5
14. A marca do meu automóvel apela à experimentação.					
15. A marca do meu automóvel proporciona-me experiências sensoriais.					
16. A marca do meu automóvel é interessante do ponto de vista sensorial.					
17. A marca do meu automóvel é apelativa ao nível dos cinco sentidos.					
18. A marca do meu automóvel estimula a minha visão.					
19. A marca do meu automóvel estimula a minha audição.					
20. A marca do meu automóvel estimula o meu olfato.					
21. A marca do meu automóvel estimula o meu paladar.					
22. A marca do meu automóvel estimula o meu tato.					
23. Sinto-me satisfeito(a) quando utilizo o meu automóvel.					
24. A marca do meu automóvel faz-me sentir feliz.					
25. A marca do meu automóvel proporciona-me prazer.					
26. A marca do meu automóvel está orientada para a diversão.					
27. Fiquei apaixonado(a) pela marca do meu automóvel desde a primeira vez que o experimentei.					

8. Se tivesse que nos dar a sua opinião sobre uma pessoa em particular, provavelmente usaria um conjunto de atributos para a caracterizar a personalidade. O mesmo pode acontecer com uma marca. Assim, pergunte a si próprio “**Se o meu automóvel fosse uma pessoa, como é que eu o descrevia?**” e assinale com **um** círculo o número que melhor caracteriza os atributos do seu automóvel, sendo que 1 corresponde a “Muito inadequado” e 5 a “Muito adequado”.

Sincero	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Excitante	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Competente	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Sofisticado	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Agressivo	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Apaixonado	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado
Divertido	Muito inadequado	1	2	3	4	5	Muito adequado

9. O seu questionário está prestes a ser finalizado. Para o concluir, agradecemos que preencha o seguinte quadro com **as informações sócio-demográficas**.

SEXO: ☐ Masculino ☐ Feminino

IDADE: _____

PROFISSÃO (assinale a principal apenas):

☐ Exerce uma profissão por conta própria

☐ Doméstico(a)

☐ Exerce uma profissão por conta de outrém

☐ Reformado(a)

☐ Desempregado(a)

☐ Outra

☐ Estudante

ESTADO CIVIL:

☐ Solteiro(a)

☐ Casado(a) sem registo

☐ Casado(a) com registo

☐ Separado(a)

☐ Divorciado(a)

☐ Viúvo(a)

☐ Outra

GRAU DE ESCOLARIDADE MAIS ELEVADO:

☐ 4º ano completo ou menos

☐ 12º ano

☐ 9º ano

☐ Curso superior completo

AGREGADO FAMILIAR: _____

DISTRITO ONDE RESIDE: _____

ÁREAS DE INTERESSE:

☐ Design ☐ Leitura ☐ Música ☐ Viagens ☐ Tecnologia

**O QUESTIONÁRIO FOI CONCLUÍDO.
REITERAMOS O NOSSO AGRADECIMENTO PELA SUA COLABORAÇÃO.**

APPENDIX II

Measurement scale (5-point Likert type scale, 1 = much inadequate, 5 = much adequate)

Brand Personality

- BP 1 Sincere
- BP 2 Exciting
- BP 3 Competent
- BP 4 Sophisticated
- BP 5 Rough

Measurement scale (5-point Likert type scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

Brand Relationship

- BR 1 My car brand cares about my opinion.
- BR 2 I use my car brand to differentiate myself from others.
- BR 3 Based on my car brand, other people can tell who I am.
- BR 4 My car brand mirrors who I am.

Brand Sensuality

- BS 1 My car brand appeals to trial.
- BS 2 My car brand provides me sensory experiences.
- BS 3 My car brand is interesting in a sensory way.
- BS 4 My car brand stimulates all five senses.

Brand Experience

- BE 1 My car brand makes me happy.
- BE 2 My car brand gives me pleasure.
- BE 3 My car brand is fun orientated.
- BE 4 I loved my car brand from the first time I tried it.

Consumer-based brand equity

- CBBE 1 I am able to recognize my car brand among other competing brands.
 - CBBE 2 Some characteristics of my car brand come to my mind quickly.
 - CBBE 3 I can quickly recall the logo of my car brand.
 - CBBE 4 I consider myself to be loyal to my car brand.
 - CBBE 5 If I have to buy a new car, my actual brand would be my first choice.
 - CBBE 6 I would be willing to pay a higher price for my car brand in a future purchase.
 - CBBE 7 I recommend my car brand to my friends.
-

APPENDIX III

ID	BR 1	BR 2	BR 3	BR 4	CBBE 1	CBBE 2	CBBE 3	CBBE 4	CBBE 5	CBBE 6	CBBE 7	BS 1	BS 2	BS 3	BS 4	BE 1	BE 2	BE 3	BE 4	BP 1	BP 2	BP 3	BP 4	BP 5	SEX	AGE	PROF	HAB	EST	AGREG	DIST	DES	MUS	TEC	READ	TRAV		
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ID	BR 1	BR 2	BR 3	BR 4	CBBE 1	CBBE 2	CBBE 3	CBBE 4	CBBE 5	CBBE 6	CBBE 7	BS 1	BS 2	BS 3	BS 4	BE 1	BE 2	BE 3	BE 4	BP 1	BP 2	BP 3	BP 4	BP 5	SEX	AGE	PROF	HAB	EST	AGREG	DIST	DES	MUS	TEC	READ	TRAV	
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ID	BR 1	BR 2	BR 3	BR 4	CBBE 1	CBBE 2	CBBE 3	CBBE 4	CBBE 5	CBBE 6	CBBE 7	BS 1	BS 2	BS 3	BS 4	BE 1	BE 2	BE 3	BE 4	BP 1	BP 2	BP 3	BP 4	BP 5	SEX	AGE	PROF	HAB	EST	AGREG	DIST	DES	MUS	TEC	READ	TRAV
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ID	BR 1	BR 2	BR 3	BR 4	CBBE 1	CBBE 2	CBBE 3	CBBE 4	CBBE 5	CBBE 6	CBBE 7	BS 1	BS 2	BS 3	BS 4	BE 1	BE 2	BE 3	BE 4	BP 1	BP 2	BP 3	BP 4	BP 5	SEX	AGE	PROF	HAB	EST	AGREG	DIST	DES	MUS	TEC	READ	TRAV															
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ESSAY 1

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Abstract

This paper is entirely conceptual in nature and it is developed through the context of discovery. The authors present a review of theoretically relevant work from marketing, branding and consumer psychology and demonstrate that in the literature, there is a gap with respect to how consumers perceive, as opposed to actually experience a brand as image through the human senses. The article discusses how to delve deeper into the customers mind and treat them in a more personal manner through differentiating and expressing a brand. Moreover, it discusses the concept of sensorial strategies in contrast to transactional strategies and relational strategies and considers how a sensory marketing model can be regarded as an alternative to conventional marketing models. The authors then define and elaborate the concept of sensorial strategies and propose a strategic sensorial brand approach for differentiating and positioning a brand in the human mind. This paper considers how the concept of sensorial strategies explains why value co-creation should be related to the human senses in a sensory marketing context.

Keywords: sensory marketing model, branding, human senses, sensorial strategies.

Introduction

Marketing is reinventing itself as a discipline in contemporary society and drawing on to the conceptual accomplishments of the past in order to create a renewed focus on customers as individuals with human senses and brands as images. As Webster (1988) argues, it becomes necessary to “*rediscover marketing to scrape away from the encrustations of strategic marketing*” and revert to an “*intuitive, creative, flexible, idiographic approach*” (Brown, 1999, p. 42) in which “*each marketing situation should be treated as unique*” (Gummesson, 1987, p. 19) and the individual constitutes the central element of the multi-sensory brand-experience (Hultén et al., 2009).

Since the 1950s, marketing models have been developed to cover the marketing process with respect to consumers, non-profit, goods or services. The transactional marketing (TM) model gained wide acceptance among marketers. It is grounded on microeconomic theory and the behavioral theory of the firm, from an exchange perspective. The model is based on “goods logic”, in which the individual is regarded as a consumer with average needs in a mass-market context, in which advertising is a major tool for reaching to the market. The model is built around acquiring customers, short-term exchanges and single transactions between an active seller and a passive buyer.

Despite the apparent supremacy of TM and the marketing mix approach, mainly due to its simplicity, doubts started to be raised from scholars and practitioners working in industrial and service sectors, who advocated that it was too restrictive, overly scientific and based solely on short-term economic transactions. New frames of reference started

to appear and with it a paradigm shift in marketing, that proclaimed for the benefits of relational strategies (Egan, 2008).

The relationship marketing (RM) model is more sophisticated in terms of relationship marketing. It is based on interactions, networks and relationships between active and adaptive sellers and buyers. The model revolves around customer retention, long-term relationships, two-way communication and personal interactions, emphasizing a customer-centric view with relationship handling in the focus of a firm's marketing strategy and tactics.

Despite RM's rise to the highest level of marketing theory, some doubts were raised once again as to whether companies would always (or indeed ever) find it suitable or profitable to develop relational strategies (Egan, 2008), or whether they should rather combine TM and RM approaches at a managerial level, as suggested by Brodie *et al.* (1997) in the marketing strategy continuum hypothesis.

Hultén (2011) proposes a sensory marketing model that takes its point of departure in the human mind and senses, where mental flows, processes and physiological reactions lay the ground for a multisensory brand-experience (Table 1). His research is in accordance with the marketing strategy continuum hypothesis, since it combines both transactional and relational strategies in facilitating a multisensory brand-experience.

Inspired by service logic, we assume that the value of a brand emerges when interactions occur through the customer's multi-sensory experiences in the value-generating process, creating a symbiosis between individual and brand. This view contrasts with the axiom of traditional marketing, that self interest and competition are the drivers of value creation and is in accordance with relationship marketers who believe that it is mutual cooperation that delivers value.

Table 1. From transaction and relationship to sensory marketing

	Transaction marketing	Relationship marketing	Sensory marketing
Marketing	Goods logic Exchange perspective Transaction marketing	Service logic Relationship perspective Relationship marketing	Experiential logic Brand perspective Sensory marketing
Strategic marketing	Product focus Customer acquisition Transactional strategies	Customer focus Customer retention Relational strategies	Multisensory focus Customer treatment Sensorial strategies
Tactical marketing	Persuasion and promotion One-way communication Production technology	Interaction and interplay Two-way communication Information technology	Dialogue and on-line interactivity Multi-sensory communication Digital technology

Source: Hultén (2011).

In the branding and marketing literature, there is a paucity of knowledge in understanding how individuals involved in purchase and consumption processes perceive and experience a brand as image. We propose that sensory marketing, defined as "*marketing that engages the consumer's senses and affects their behavior*" (Krishna, 2010, p. 2), is likely to fill this gap and contributes substantially to the development of brand management, as well as marketing management in both theory and practice. We also suggest that by using sensorial strategies based on cognitive, emotional or value-

based elements, firms can differentiate brands and products and challenge the individual mind in a highly individualized manner, thus impacting on consumer behavior.

This paper is entirely conceptual and developed through the context of discovery in presenting ideas that may result in scientific progress (Hunt, 2002). It is through the context of justification, operationalization procedures and empirical evidence that the ideas presented do or do not bear fruit. Accordingly, the paper opens up empirical research opportunities for testing and validating the presented ideas empirically.

For this reason, the main objective is to conceptualize and propose a strategic sensorial brand approach for firms on the basis of three issues: (1) branding as a process of value co-creation; (2) the multi-sensory brand-experience concept; and (3) the concept of sensorial strategies. The presented framework discusses the relationships between branding as co-creation and brand as image in relation to the human senses, through the concept of sensorial strategies.

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, we present brands and branding as value co-creation, and the multi-sensory brand-experience in relation to the human senses. Secondly, we discuss the impact of sensory stimuli and cues on consumer behavior in relation to sensorial strategies. Thirdly, we propose a definition of sensorial strategies and suggest a strategic sensorial brand approach. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main contributions and theoretical implications, as well as suggestions for future research.

1. Value co-creation of brands

In the field of marketing, a paradigm shift from the traditional goods-dominant logic to the new service dominant logic (SDL) is taking place (Payne et al., 2009). The existing dominant logic is moving from the exchange of tangible goods to one of intangibles like knowledge, processes and skills (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The new view is challenging the traditional goods-dominant logic, recognizing its limitations whereby the customer perspective has often been neglected (Smit et al., 2007).

Furthermore, this newer approach emphasizes the customer as a co-creator of value, where the “brand becomes the experience” (Prahalad and Ramasvamy, 2004). The customer perspective is central in a service-dominant logic, in accordance with the need to rethink the traditional view of marketing in favour of a more value-based logic. This involves customer value creation as a way of redefining markets in contrast to traditional conceptualizations (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005).

The point of departure of the service-dominant logic is the fact that service is the common denominator in exchange processes and not some special form of exchange. This view also posits that customer value and customer value creating processes are built upon a supplier’s ability to learn and understand how to support the co-creation activities of the customer (Payne et al., 2009). In this regard, a service-dominant logic seems to be more integrative than a goods-dominant logic (Vargo and Morgan, 2005). The idea is that, in terms of co-creation, a customer participates and interacts with a supplier in a number of aspects, ranging from design to consumption. Researchers such

as Grönroos (2000) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2001) further claim that the value is embedded in a co-creation process between supplier and customer and the customer is active instead of passive.

Payne *et al.* (2009, p. 379) claim that “*remarkably little attention focuses on the brand*” in the new service dominant logic. However, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggest an experience-based co-creation perspective, in order to emphasize brands and branding in terms of co creation and personalized experiences. This corresponds to the notion of experiential marketing from Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982) and Schmitt (1999), where contexts, aesthetics, emotions and symbolic aspects of customer and brand experiences are significant (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

In this paper, it is proposed that a sensory marketing model is grounded in a branding perspective, relating to service-dominant logic, in offering co-creation and personalized brand experiences. Especially with regard to the focus of service-dominant logic on *intangibility*, i.e., brand as image through brand experiences, *exchange processes*, i.e., brand co-creation and value creation, and *relationships*, i.e., brand relationships in B2C as well as B2B. Altogether, service-dominant logic as a paradigm offers a conceptual, theoretical context incorporating a branding perspective which emphasizes the significance of the human mind and the senses.

Moreover, we propose that sensorial strategies further strengthen customer-brand relationships built upon the mental perceptions of a brand (i.e., brand as image) and its attributes, challenging individuals through brand personality. Even though a sensory encounter with a brand can often be considered as transaction based, we believe that such encounters have important emotional and sensory impacts, enhancing short-term or long-term customer-brand relationships. This point has so far not been recognized in branding and marketing theory. For this reason, we argue that in a sensory marketing model, a branding perspective should be related to service-dominant logic as an all-embracing paradigm.

2. Multi-sensory brand-experience as image

It is commonly accepted that brands are partners in a dyadic relationship with consumers and that brand personality influences the relationship consumers establish with brands (Aaker, 1996; Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Aggarwal, 2004; Blackston, 1993; Fournier, 1995; 1998; Nobre *et al.*, 2010). This view highlights the holistic character of the brand and is in accordance with the claimed need for a relational consumption approach (Keller, 2003).

The innovative approach of Fournier (1998) has grounded the concept of consumer-brand relationships in an interpersonal relationship metaphor, by concluding that they are a source of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-identity. Building on Fournier's study, Aaker *et al.* (2004) developed a conceptual model to explain consumer-brand relationships, postulating that acts of transgression and brand personality play a prominent role in the relationship strength formation.

Brand personality is based largely on inferences from observations of behaviors that the brand develops as a partner in a relationship with the customer. This relation is dynamic and formed by both physical and psychological elements of the product and the signs of brand identity (Batra et al., 1993; Kapferer, 1994). Moreover, Fournier and Lee (2009) claim the need for a more flexible brand relationship that allows individuals to adopt new roles as lives, ages and values change. The process is based on an equilibrium between consumer personality and brand personality.

Contemporary consumers seek new consumption experiences in their everyday lives and the consumption process has been affected by the constant need for novelty, imagery, emotion and fun (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982; Schmitt, 1999). Some scholars (Cova, 1999; Brown, 1999) advocate that individualization as a lifestyle expresses contemporary societal culture and that self-fulfillment is linked to the quality of life and welfare, in terms of changing consumption patterns. In contemporary society, *“the meanings of objects are no longer fixed or linked to their functions, but are free-floating as each individual may ascribe the meanings he/she desires to the object”* (Cova, 1999, p. 77). It is clear that these cognitive and emotional needs can only be fulfilled if brand personality is built congruently on sensorial strategies that generate unique and unforgettable multi-sensory brand-experiences in a B2B or B2C relationship context.

Each individual perceives and experiences service, both goods and service components, through the senses. It is in the human brain that the sensory information is stored (sensory memory) and an image is created in terms of mental conceptions and imagination (short-term memory) to be further activated by long-term memory. This image is the result of the positive or negative sensory experiences an individual derives from a service that is synonymous with the brand (Grönroos, 2007). Hultén *et al.* (2009) consider that each individual has a subjective experience, which can be described as “experience logic”, and that logic is individual and personal based on how individual human senses perceive and interpret the multi-sensory brand-experience.

Furthermore, a sensory marketing model advocates that a firm should treat its customers intimately and personally. In order to generate customer value, firms should create brand experiences and sensory atmospheres, in which emotions can be expressed and memories activated further (Hultén et al., 2009). Multi-sensory brand-experiences should appeal to the human mind and senses, providing a consumption experience directed towards “fantasies, feelings and having fun” (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982), with products becoming “artefacts around which customers have experiences” (Pralhalad and Ramasvamy, 2000).

A basic assumption in a sensory marketing model is that multi-sensory brand-experiences only takes place when interactions occur between individuals and firms, based on a stimulation of the five senses in generating customer value, experiences and brand as image. Deeping and individualizing new sensory experiences of different kinds *“can increase the quality of customer treatment, which can lead to stronger brand recognition and brand image in the long term”* (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 13). This view is in accordance with Lindstrom (2005), who advocates that the emotional link between

the consumer and the brand can be enhanced through a multi-sensorial communication platform.

Moreover, the customer's emotional mood will be enhanced and more intense, because of the appealing level of the brand experience and the number of senses involved in the sensory stimulation. In this regard, a sensory marketing model suggests both a transactional and a relational approach, in order to treat "*customers through sensorial strategies to accomplish a supreme sensory experience*" (op. cit., p. 14) based on a dyadic relationship between the consumer and the brand in a B2B or B2C brand relationship context.

3. Consumer behavior and sensorial strategies

3.1. The impact on consumer behavior

Research on consumer psychology has demonstrated how sensory stimuli and cues are evaluated and guided by our perceptions which are linked to previous experiences. Through the sensory organs, individuals collect information in an active process that is coordinated to form a perceptual pattern which is stored in the memory. It is commonly accepted that our memory consists of three components: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory. The sensory memory allows us to store information received through the senses for a very brief period of time. Provided the information captures the person's attention – a strange sound, a pleasant smell, a smooth texture, a different colour or a tasty gift – it will be retained for further processing and transferred to short-term memory and subsequently to long-term memory. A clear grouping of the various pieces of information enhances memory performance and the upcoming sensory stimulus will be strong enough to reactive memories, based on the level of similarity between encoding and retrieval conditions. The different senses can also be used to capture consumers' attention, depending on the relevance of the message, novelty of the stimulus and the consumer's motivation (Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

Academic research on the human senses has also shown that different sensory impressions impact on consumer behavior and perceptions of goods and services. Most of these empirical studies state that senses are linked to memories, emotions and feelings and establish strong physical and psychological interactions with goods and services. Research on the sense of sight indicates a high correlation between for example, the design quality of visual stimuli and financial performance (Hertenstein and Platt, 2001; Wallace, 2001). Advertisements, color, design, lighting, logo, packaging, product design and web-sites are other visual stimuli that make it possible to differentiate products, enhance loyalty, prevent clutter and fend off competition (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

The sense of smell is regarded as one of the most powerful for creating associations and evoking memories (Aggleton and Waskett, 1999). The perception of olfaction is hedonic and based on an effective evaluation of smells and which impacts on consumer moods and psychological arousal (Ellen and Bone, 1998). Moreover, research has shown that ambient scents have positive effects on both store and product evaluations (Spangenberg *et al.*, 1996) and that pleasant scents can enhance customer shopping

behavior in terms of increased expenditures and more money spent in the store (Spangenberg *et al.*, 1996; Morrin and Chebat, 2005). In sensory marketing, scents can be used in strategic marketing to express the brand's identity and strengthen its image, or as a marketing tactic to advertise a product.

Tactile sense research points out the differences in individual motivations to touch, products attributes that support touch, as well as situational factors supporting touch (Peck and Childers, 2010) as drivers of individualized perceptions. By using touch as an individual's preference for having information about a product, a positive affective response might result in more favourable attitudes towards a product (Peck and Wiggins, 2006). Material, surface, temperature, weight, form and steadiness can all contribute positively to the tactile experience of the brand and differentiate it from competitors, thus enhancing loyalty.

Research on the sense of sound has shown that music exerts a positive impact on buying behavior and store atmosphere (Areni and Kim; 1993; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Morrison, 2002) by creating associations and evoking memories. Several empirical studies reveal positive correlations between music and the time spent shopping (Milliman, 1982; Kellaris *et al.*, 1992; Morrison, 2002), recognizing its evocative power as a means of differentiating a firm and impacting on consumer moods and buying behavior. Different kinds of sensory expressions (jingles, voices, music, atmosphere theme and advertency, sound brand and signature sound) can all facilitate a sound experience and can be applied consistently throughout a firm's sensory marketing, so as to achieve differentiation (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

The sense of taste is considered one of the most distinctly emotional, due to its capacity to facilitate social exchanges among people, its inner connections to other senses and high degree of interaction between firms and customers at a personal level. Research shows that a taste experience persuades customers to stay longer in a shop, which in turn leads to higher consumption. Firms can apply tastes to flavour a brand and give it new hedonic dimensions expressed by multiple sense expressions (Hultén *et al.*, 2009).

Hence, we propose that sensorial strategies can impact on consumer behavior in a completely different way to TM and RM, depending on how senses are related to one another in the specific context and how the sensory intensity level is managed, so as to achieve the multi-sensory brand experience.

3.2. Sensorial strategies in relation to the human mind and senses

Research has shown that the consumer has become a "sense producer" (Filser, 2002), feeling both positive and negative experiences through purchasing and consumption processes. The consumer no longer relates only to utilitarian and cognitive values, but also to the symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic values of consumption. In this sense, we propose that sensorial strategies are directed towards emotional and cognitive responses, aiming at creating sustainable and congruent brands in a sensory marketing context.

A sensory marketing model "offers a firm the opportunity to differentiate and express a brand through sensorial strategies, based on cognitive, emotional or value-based

elements in relation to the human mind and senses” (Hultén, 2011, p. 4). His research explains why firms focus on the human mind and senses, suggesting that firms should apply sensorial strategies on a long-term basis. This process is expressed through sensors, sensations and sensory expressions, both related to and independent of each other, leaving individual and personal imprints of a good or service, thus distinguishing a brand effectively from competing ones.

However, it should be noted that, the current marketing and branding literature, offers no clear and generally accepted definition of sensorial strategies. Hultén (2011, p. 16) advocates that a strategy can be defined as sensorial “*when it appeals to a certain sense or senses in the customer’s mind.*”

We propose that a sensorial strategy can be defined as an emotional and cognitive strategic approach developed by a firm or a brand in order to establish, maintain and enhance multiple and profitable relationships. This approach follows a service logic that delivers congruent customer value and brand image with respect to a certain human sense or senses in the customer’s mind.

A relational strategy has often been presented in opposition to a transactional strategy (Christopher *et al.*, 1991) and these two approaches are considered opposing sides of the continuum of all possible marketing strategies (Slater and Olson, 2000). In this paper, we regard sensorial strategies as including both transactional and relational considerations, so as to convey the desired brand value to the customer. Therefore, we propose that developing a sensorial strategy of a brand consists of positioning the brand as image and establishing durable and profitable relationships with individuals, based on the human mind and senses, and that this is at the heart of the strategic process of the firm. The interaction established between the brand and its customers can be either relational or transactional, but it should always incorporate sensory interactions in delivering a multi-sensory brand-experience in relation to the human mind and senses.

4. A strategic sensorial brand approach

In the prevailing society, which is characterized by information overload, a lack of time and a aestheticization of everyday life, we believe that it is no longer possible for firms to support brand strategies exclusively through transactional marketing (TM) or relational marketing (RM) as before. Instead, we propose that sensorial strategies, based on the sensory marketing model (SM), should be seen as a strategic branding approach to creating brand awareness and establishing a sustainable brand image in the long run.

As previously stated, Hultén (2011) suggests that in a sensory marketing model, sensorial strategies are expressed by sensors, sensations and sensory expressions. In this paper, we propose that such strategies use sensors as multi-directional communicative means for determining the sensorial strategies, since it is possible to gather information about the human mind and senses through technological devices, observation methods, employees and direct interaction with customers. From this interactive process between firms and individuals, sensory expressions should be selected, in order to create cues or stimuli that express brand personality. By using sensors and sensory expressions in an integrated manner firms should create sensations based on an interactive multi-sensory

communication platform, neither transactional nor relational, that will impact on customers' emotional state and mood in facilitating the multi-sensory brand-experience.

Moreover, we claim that from a tactical perspective sensorial strategies for sight, sound, smell, taste and touch can be applied to products, communication, events and places, either individually or combined, and all tactic actions should be conducted according to a sensorial strategic marketing plan. In this regard, Hultén (2011) proposes dialogue and on-line interaction, multi-sensory communication and digital technology as means of reaching the customer's mind in developing and implementing sensorial strategies.

We have generally observed that more and more firms are building emotional linkages to their brands in addition to rational ones in attracting the human senses, according to the work of such practitioners as Gobé (2001) and Lindstrom (2005). Based on anecdotal evidence, we claim that companies like Starbucks, Apple and Absolut Vodka illustrate how it is possible to apply sensorial strategies in order to enhance the customer's multi-sensory brand-experiences in a sensory marketing context.

As early as the 1980s, Starbucks developed sensorial strategies for creating and developing an in-store customer experience through multiple sensory expressions related to the smell of coffee, the relaxing sound of music, the pleasant and restful interiors, the shapes of the armchairs and the taste of the freshly ground coffee served to customers. All of these sensory expressions create a multi-sensory atmosphere and customers perceive sensations that impact on their emotional state and mood. Differentiation at an individual basis is created to provide the multi-sensory brand-experience within a branding perspective following a service-dominant logic.

Apple is yet another example of a symbiosis between a brand and its customers in terms of sensorial strategies for sight, sound and touch. All of its products are sensory and designed to create tactile sensations by touching the screens, shapes and materials. All Apple's products reach the customer's mind at a deep level, combining utilitarian functionalities with fantasies, feelings and fun towards a holistic consumption experience, which constantly renews itself in the form of multiple transactions.

Absolut Vodka is another brand that interacts with its customers, using sensorial strategies based on sight, touch and taste, applied to the unique shape of its bottle and its innovative forms of communication and events, inspired by art and other cultural expressions. Add to this the Absolut Vodka bars, where sensory expressions are combined in a creative and congruent manner. As a brand, Absolut Vodka combines transactional strategies based on its product characteristics, and on relational strategies through adding new emotional dimensions to a tribalized consumption that derives from the product's ability to link individuals a unique multi-sensory brand-experience in a sensory marketing context.

Following this anecdotal evidence, we argue that all of these brands have been able to increase the quality of customer treatment and enhance brand recognition and brand image by developing a strategic sensorial branding approach. By doing so, these brands establish durable and profitable relationships with individuals, based on the brand as image, as the heart of the strategic process of the firm. This interaction is neither

transactional nor relational, but sensorial, in relation to the human mind and senses, and built on a dyadic relationship between the brand and the individual.

Conclusions, theoretical implications and future research

Researchers such as Krishna (2010), Brakus *et al.* (2009) and Lindstrom (2005) all emphasize the need for new conceptual thinking relating to brands, experiences and human senses. Our starting point has been to conceptualize a branding perspective within a sensory marketing model, in contrast to transaction marketing (TM) and relationship marketing (RM), as a theoretical dilemma. The analysis enhances our understanding of the factors that impact on customer brand experiences of goods and services, as well as how sensory cues and stimuli impact on consumer behavior through the human senses. The conceptual framework we have developed offers a different conceptual approach to how companies should view the strategic branding process in general and with respect to developing sensorial strategies in particular.

This paper draws attention to the relationship between value co-creation through brands, sensorial strategies and human senses, as an important contextual issue for branding and marketing theory. The significance of the human senses relating to seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting, where individuals perceive and experience goods and services as brand as image raises the issue of how companies can create and deliver meaningful and powerful personalized experiences.

To conclude, we have demonstrated that sensorial strategies as a strategic brand approach for firms should benefit from involving the individual's human senses, thus impacting on consumer behavior in purchase and consumption processes. In this regard, a sensory marketing model emphasizes a branding perspective, based upon sensors, sensations and sensory expressions as means of enhancing customer value and brand as image. We deduce that a dynamic, strategic sensorial brand approach should be seen as a practical means of solving the theoretical dilemma in relation to TM and RM.

This approach extends existing branding theory and marketing theory, so as to consider the deliberate involvement of the human senses to construct an image of a brand, based on individual perceptions and experiences in purchase and consumption processes. It is not only a question of a shift in the logic of transactions or relationships for firms, but also of constructing a system with respect to the individual as a customer, based upon sensory cues, stimuli and experiences. Accordingly, we have identified a dilemma in contemporary marketing models and thus proposed the development of the multi-sensory brand-experience in a sensory marketing context and model.

One outcome of this conceptual paper is the recognition of the need for further empirical research to validate the conceptual framework that we have proposed. This provides a starting point for a more substantial research agenda that could be based on following questions: (1) How do companies create and deliver multi-sensory brand-experiences? (2) How are customers influenced by sensorial strategies in purchase and consumption processes? and (3) What sensory cues and stimuli for seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting impact significantly on how consumers perceive and experience different brands? The concepts we have derived from the literature should

also be explored and investigated directly with businesses and customers, in order to produce a measurable framework or metric for a successful implementation of strategic sensorial branding.

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ESSAY 2

Rodrigues, C., B. Hultén e C. Brito (2013), “Sensory branding: Towards an integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence”.

Abstract

The paper addresses the theoretical development of a conceptual model within a sensory branding framework, encompassing the concepts of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality as antecedents to consumer-based brand equity and its impact on business performance. The authors present a comprehensive review of previous research in marketing and branding literature, with regard to existing evidence on the concepts of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality, in relation to consumer-based brand equity. The sensory branding framework facilitates the co-creation of value with consumers in the focus of service provision and thus impacts on consumer-based brand equity. Furthermore, it allows firms and their brands to express their personality, manage relationships with consumers and built meaningful and memorable brand experiences, as well as expressing brand sensuality. The proposed model has the potential to integrate concepts such as brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality in a conceptual framework with the regard to the significance of the human senses, sensations and sensory experiences in the branding building process. This allows marketing scholars to rethink each of the constructs separately and focus on the interrelationships between the constructs of consumer-based brand equity.

Keywords:

Conceptual paper, propositions, sensory branding model, consumer-based brand equity, business performance

1. INTRODUCTION

As leading subphenomenon of mainstream marketing, the human senses have once again been recognized as the vehicles through which consumers experience the world around them. In relation to products and services, human senses, sensations and sensory experiences are considered emergent marketing paradigms (Achrol and Kotler, 2012). At the same time, there is a shift from a goods/service- to an experience economy, in which consumers are looking for memorable, unique and meaningful experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). In this on-going transformation, some researchers suggest that firms deliver a value proposition, based on the co-creation of experiences where the brand ultimately becomes the experience (Lemke *et al.*, 2010; Vargo and Lush, 2004; Prahalad, 2004). Moreover, brand- and sensory experiences are considered relevant assets in increasingly competitive markets for enhancing consumer-based brand equity, based on differentiation, personal relationships and emotional lift (Schmitt, 1999; Keller and Lehmann, 2006).

Brand equity models share the perspective that brand equity takes place in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1993). This highlights the importance of

brands as *operant* resources in marketing strategy and consumers as active co-creators of brand value (Merz *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the branding literature explains the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity (Pappu *et al.*, 2005) and suggests the incorporation of some sub-dimensions of brand association, such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), brand relationship (Blackston, 1992; Jones, 2005, Esch *et al.*, 2006) and brand experience (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) as antecedents of brand equity. However, the extent to which some of these sub-dimensions *interdependently* and *independently* influence consumer-based brand equity has not been fully exploited and is proposed in the literature as a future research direction.

In branding, experiential and sensory marketing research (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Schmitt, 1999, 2012; Krishna, 2011), the question of how marketing and branding concepts can be integrated in to the concept of consumer-based brand equity remains unanswered (Keller, 1993; 2001; 2002; 2003). Furthermore, no marketing or branding model has theoretically integrated brand equity constructs into a conceptual framework with regard to the significance of the human senses, sensations and sensory experiences in the brand-building process.

This paper develops an integrated model with propositions for and evidence of a sensory branding framework, encompassing the concepts of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality as antecedents of consumer-based brand equity.

In this context, a comprehensive review of previous research in the marketing and branding literature is conducted, especially with regard to existing evidence on the concepts of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality, in relation to consumer-based brand equity. Accordingly, an integrated model is presented with propositions for and evidence of a sensory branding framework, encompassing the constructs of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality as antecedents of consumer-based brand equity.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 addresses the theoretical background of the research, focusing mainly on the concepts of brand image and of consumer-based brand equity. In Section 3, we develop a conceptual framework integrating four constructs (brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality), and relate them to consumer-based brand equity and business performance. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the main theoretical contributions, as well as a number of suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Brand image

As a brand knowledge construct, brand image is connected to brand equity through the constellation of ideas and images in a consumer's mind that encompasses their attitudes and knowledge towards a brand (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). They also state that brand

image is the specific concept of a brand that a consumer has based on subjective and individual perceptions and interpretations, whether emotional or reasoned.

In branding research, the concept of brand image has been linked to two empirically grounded concepts, image heritage and image-in-use, in explaining how brand image evolves over time (Rindel and Strandvik, 2010). It has been argued that image-in-use encompasses all activities in a service provision context of when, where and with whom this image was established during consumption. The concept of image-in-use has its roots in the service literature (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Grönroos, 2007), which emphasizes that value for consumers emerges from different consumption activities, often co-created between a firm and its customers.

In this regard, any direct or indirect encounter between a brand and a consumer might impact on the mental picture of a brand in the memory of consumers. (i.e. brand image) and contribute to brand equity. This might occur when a consumer is exposed to any kind of environmental input and stimuli perceived by the human senses (such as colors, jingles, logos, music, names, scents, symbols, tastes, touch and so on) as a result of marketing activities (Keller, 1993; 2002; de Chernatony and Horn, 2003). The process immediately established primary and secondary associations with and/or perceptions of the brand (Keller, 1993; 2002). Raggio and Leone (2007) suggest that brand associations and/or perceptions create brand equity through their existence in the consumer's memory, and not by the purchase itself. Furthermore, brand associations are identified as a means of enhancing differentiation (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999) and indicates whether or not the promise of a certain brand is salient (Raggio and Leone, 2007).

Consumer-based brand equity

It is commonly accepted that brand equity has a consumer-based focus, since it exists "within a consumer" and not within a brand (Keller, 1993; Rust *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, brand equity is regarded as one of many possible factors contributing to brand value, and it has been suggested that brand equity stands for what a brand really means for consumers (Raggio and Leone, 2007).

Consumer-brand based equity, as proposed by Keller (1993, p. 2) "*occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory*". Thus, the differential consumer response to the marketing of a brand is based on brand knowledge (Keller, 1993) and moderates "*the impact of marketing activities on consumer's actions*" (Raggio and Leone, 2007, p. 380).

The literature suggests that consumer-based brand equity is multidimensional (Pappu *et al.*, 2005) and that brand associations create value for consumers whenever positive attitudes and feelings are generated (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Aaker's brand equity model and Keller's CBBE model have focused mainly on how brands are perceived and evaluated by consumers, using brand knowledge structures such as brand image, awareness and personality (Aaker, 1991; Esch *et al.*, 2006). However, as indicated

earlier, the extent to which these constructs *independently* and *interdependently* influence CBBE, has not been yet determined.

Brand personality is identified in the literature as the most important form of brand association which influences brand equity (Aaker, 1991; 1997) and has been proposed as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity, which enriches the measurement of brand knowledge (Pappu *et al.*, 2005).

More recently, Esch *et al.* (2006) proposed a model which combines brand knowledge and brand relationship as antecedent to CBBE. This branding perspective suggests that the brand value co-creation process is dynamic and relational (Blackston, 1992; Merz *et al.*, 2009; Grönroos, 2007) and that its value rests in the minds of consumers, opinion makers and stakeholders as a result of a social interaction process (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Jones, 2005).

Furthermore, Esch *et al.* (2006) claim that the research on brand relationship construct should be combined with experiential marketing techniques (brand experiences), since it results in increased emotional engagement and interactions between the consumer and the brand. Brand experience, as a concept, is considered a dimension of brand knowledge (Keller, 2003) and is intended to contribute to consumer-based brand equity directly and indirectly through brand personality associations (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

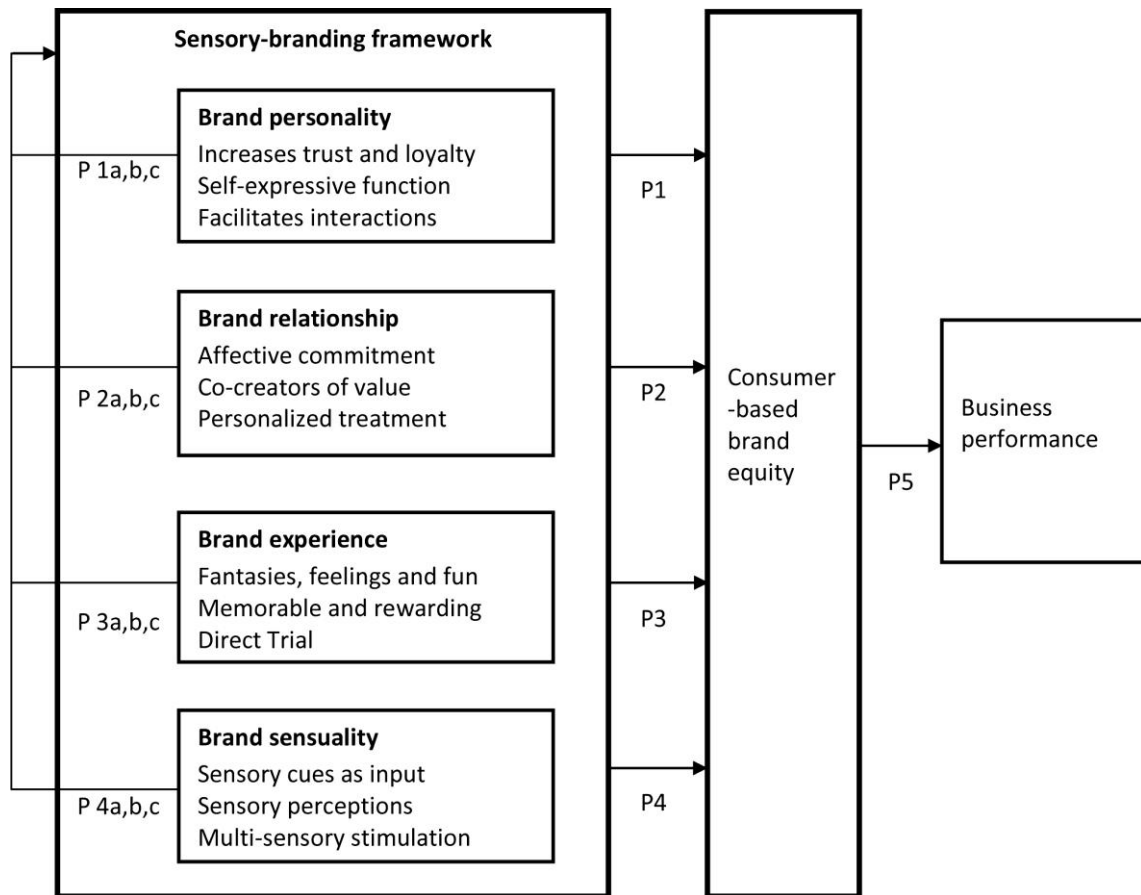
Consumers perceive brands through the human senses and derive brand associations, which are said to contain “*the meaning of the brand for consumers*” (Keller, 1993, p. 3) in the value-generating process. Within the proposed sensory branding framework, we consider four key components of consumer-based brand equity as psychological dimensions of brand knowledge, i.e. brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, that have been identified in the literature as antecedents to CBBE. We then introduce a new construct of brand sensuality, which has not been considered in the literature as an antecedent contributing to consumer-based brand equity. We propose that the four constructs are individual and influence CBBE by creating favorable, strong and unique brand knowledge in consumers' minds and thus impact ultimately on business performance.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In order to identify the antecedents of consumer-based brand equity, it is necessary to formulate a theoretical model based on constructs such as brand personality, relationship, experience and sensuality. The proposed constructs lay the foundation for the sensory-branding framework presented here (Figure 1).

The following paragraphs address each of these constructs. After elaborating on the evidence provided in the literature, a number of propositions are developed in order to clarify the links between the constructs.

Figure 1 - Sensory-branding framework



EVIDENCE AND PROPOSITIONS

Construct 1: Brand personality

The notion of brand personality is commonly accepted by many marketing academics and advertising practitioners as a key determinant of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Biel, 1993; Keller, 1993). The pioneering brand personality scale proposed by Aaker (1997), based on personality measurement theory (e.g. Norman, 1963; Osgood *et al.*, 1957), initiated a new stream of research within a relational consumption approach (Keller, 2003; Azaoulay and Kapferer, 2003). However, support for this construct is primarily anecdotal and the extent to which variables *independently* and *interdependently* influence brand performance have not been subjected to extensive empirical testing (Aaker, 1996).

Proposition 1: The stronger the brand personality is expressed to the consumer, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

In order for brands to serve as a legitimate relationship partner, Fournier (1998) and McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) suggest that marketers animate the brand as a dynamic entity in the consumer's mind and constantly reinterpret individual perceptions about brand personality, so as "to keep the brand fresh".

Proposition 1a: The more the brand personality increases consumer trust and loyalty, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

Some scholars argue that a strong brand personality increases consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), as well as levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998), evokes emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993) and encourages active and systematic processing with high consumer motivation (Biel, 1993).

Proposition 1b: The more the brand personality serves as a self-expressive or symbolic function, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

Defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), brand personality is either treated in the marketing literature as brand identity as a whole (Aaker, 1997) or a dimension of it (Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 1993; Azaouly and Kapferer, 2003) and serves a symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993), providing the basis for distinct and sustainable competitive advantage (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999; Freeling and Forbes, 2005). It is argued that consumers can easily ascribe human characteristics to inanimate brand objects and that they think about brands as if they were celebrities, famous historical figures or just human characters (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1984-85; Rook, 1985).

Proposition 1c: The more the brand personality creates behavioral trait inferences, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

Academic research on the antecedents of brand personality has suggested that behavioral trait inferences are based on both physical and psychological elements of the product and the elements of brand identity (Batra *et al.*, 1993, Kapferer, 1994; Plummer, 1984-85), thus facilitating interactions with the non-material world (Fournier, 1998). Kum *et al.* (2012) states that brand personality inferences are contingent upon products meanings, and vary for symbolic and functional products. Furthermore, a number of studies have demonstrated that the greater the congruity between the perceived product user image and the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1986; Sirgy *et al.*, 2000) regarded as a cognitive referent in assessing symbolic cues, the greater the preference for the brand (e.g. Malhotra, 1998; Sirgy, 1982; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010).

Construct 2: Brand relationship

Considered as a logical extension of brand personality, the concept of consumer-brand relationships is identified in the marketing literature as a long-term interactive process involving the brand, the consumer (Blackston, 1992; Fournier, 1998; Grönroos, 2007) and other brand stakeholders (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) in the value-generating process, and contributes to forming a strong brand image (Aaker, 1996). Of particular interest is the brand relationship framework proposed by Fournier (1998), based on the brand as an active, enthusiastic and productive relationship partner. In this regard, the brand is perceived as a behavioural entity that adds meanings to consumers' lives (Ligas and Cotte, 1999) and facilitates multifaceted holistic relationships in which multi-sensory brand experiences play an important role (Schmitt, 1999) in binding consumers together.

Proposition 2: The greater the significance of brand relationship, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

When relating to brands on a trivial and daily basis, consumers follow the norms that govern social relationships, manifest different levels of reciprocity (Bhattacharya and Bolton, 2000) and are sensitive or benevolent to the acts of brand transgression or product recall (Aggarwal, 2004; Korkofingas and Ang, 2011). Moreover, Aaker *et al.* (2004) suggests a relationship between brand personality and the kind of relationship the consumer establishes with brands. Specifically, their research shows that "sincere" brands tend to facilitate close, increasingly intimate and long-term relationships based on trust, in which consumers are more sensitive to the effects of transgression. By contrast, excitement brands tend to nurture enthusiastic but less stable relationships and customers are more kindly disposed towards acts of transgression.

Grounded on relationship marketing theories, it is suggested that both consumers and brands should access two-way communication channels in order to increase interaction and develop enduring relationship ties (Duncan and Moriaty, 1998; Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1994; Kotler, 1991). Thus, the more firms are proactive in enhancing relational brand attractiveness in an individualized manner to create co-value as a result of multi-sensory brand experiences the greater the likelihood of increasing consumer-based brand equity (Martin, 1998; Keller, 2003).

Proposition 2a: The greater the consumer affective commitment to the brand, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

Merz *et al.* (2009) argues that brand value is co-created by affective relationships that consumers form with brands as a result of direct or indirect brand experiences. In this context, the sum of experiences that the consumer establishes with a particular brand in different encounters forms the brand relationship (Grönroos, 2007). The experiential view of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) has sparked renewed interest in consumer affective commitment to the brand. Grounded in the relationship marketing literature, commitment is proposed in the consumer-brand

relationship literature as one of the facets of brand relationship quality (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Fournier, 1998). Furthermore, research on buying behaviour emphasizes the role of brand attachment, together with brand trust and brand satisfaction, in building successful brands in the long-term (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006).

It is important to note that similarities between brand and interpersonal relationships facilitate high-quality relationships based on a sense of commitment and belonging that bonds consumers to brands as a result of positive experiences (Fournier, 1998; de Chernatony and McDonald, 1998; Ghodeswar, 2008). An empirical study by Reimann *et al.* (2012) shows that strong positive sentiment towards brands is more evident in recently formed, closer consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, emotional arousal decreases over as the relationship develops or becomes irrelevant for brands towards which consumers are not willing to establish closer connections. Research also suggests that identification between the brand and consumer self-concepts increases over the course of the relationship, so that consumers tend to consider the brand as part of their lives.

Proposition 2b: The greater the extent to which brand stakeholders are active co-creators of value, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

The shift in thinking about branding initiated a new marketing era in which both brands and consumers are regarded as *operant* resources in the brand value creation process (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). This relational perspective considers that individual consumers, brand communities and other brand stakeholders are active participants in the creation of brand equity. That is, value co-creation takes place in consumer' minds, and brand value is determined by perceived value-in-use instead of value-in-exchange (Merz *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the value co-creation process between the brand and the consumer as an individual is no longer solely relational (Fournier, 1998; Aaker, 1997). Rather, it implies highly dynamic and social interactions between the firm, the brand and all stakeholders (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Jones, 2005; Matzler *et al.*, 2011).

According to Payne *et al.* (2007), value does not reside in the object of consumption, but in the experience of consumption. Consequently, high quality relationships that enable active and networked consumers to co-create and personalize experiences in multiple points of interaction with the brand are identified as sources of a firm's competitive advantage (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). This holistic perspective is consistent with a participatory and dynamic service-dominant logic which posits that value is defined and co-created throughout the consumer-brand relationship (Vargo and Lush, 2004), which is individual, longitudinal, contextual and interactive-based (Payne *et al.*, 2007). Thus, co-created value can be regarded as the outcome of individual and personalized multi-sensory brand-experiences, in which dialogue, personalized treatment, interactions and customization play a central role in consumer-brand relationships (Rajah *et al.*, 2008).

Proposition 2c: The greater the consumer is treated intimately and personally, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

Some scholars point to intimacy and personalized consumer treatment as one of the most emotional triggers for enhancing consumer-brand relationships (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). This view is consistent with a service logic perspective, which posits that consumers are relevant individually and that firms should treat them intimately and personally. Moreover, the sum of consumer inferences resulting either from brand attitudes and brand behaviour contribute to forming positive or negative judgments of its role as a partner in its dyadic relationship with the brand (Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Fournier, 1998). As a result, consumers built mental images of ideal partners and these partners' traits are considered before engaging in an intimate relationship with brands (Fletcher *et al.*, 2000).

Construct 3: Brand experience

A significant part of the literature shares the perspective that customers interact with firms holistically and focus on specific contexts in isolation (Lemke *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). An experience results from an interactive process (Gentile *et al.*, 2007) between a consumer and a firm and is conceptualized as “*the customer's subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm*” (Lemke *et al.*, 2010). The seductive aspects of experience are considered to attract consumers' attention and cause them to be intrigued, since experience is engaging, nonpartisan, pseudodiagnostic and endogenous (Hoch, 2002). Moreover, consumers are no longer passive receptors of firms' marketing actions and their perceptions of brands are individually-based and dependent on past experiences, either positive or negative, short-lived or long-lasting (de Chernatony, 1993, Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

Proposition 3: The greater the significance of brand experience, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

The concept of brand experience was recently introduced into the marketing literature by Brakus *et al.* (2009, p. 59) and defined as “*subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments*”. Drawing on insights from Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999), these scholars identified four brand dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural) which are evoked, directly or indirectly, by a set of distinctive related stimuli when consumers search for, shop for or consume brands (Schmitt, 1999; Arnold *et al.*, 2005; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). With the emergence of the sensory marketing framework, branding has broadened its experiential perspective to include a multi-sensory brand approach (Krishna, 2010, 2011).

Few empirical studies have sought to document the impact of brand experiences on consumer behaviour. One exception is Brakus *et al.* (2009), which shows that brand experience has a positive behavioural impact on consumer satisfaction, loyalty and brand associations, through brand personality. Moreover, it has become clear that brand experiences are not motivationally orientated (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) and that brand value can be created indirectly even, if consumers do not become brand buyers (Merz *et al.*, 2009).

Proposition 3a: The more the brand experience involves fantasies, positive feelings and fun, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

The consumer research literature focuses on bi-dimensional attitudinal behaviour, claiming that consumers purchase services and goods in order to simultaneously derive hedonic gratification from sensory attributes and to satisfy their utilitarian and variety-seeking consumption needs (Batra and Ahtola, 1990). The experiential perspective proposed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) focuses on primary process thinking, in which immediate pleasure and sensory gratification is pursued when consumers relate to brands (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). This pleasure-oriented consumption seeks sensory stimulation, arousal, fun, amusement, fantasy and enjoyment (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and suggests that brands which make consumers happy or joyful are associated with higher levels of attitudinal commitment and purchase loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Furthermore, empirical research demonstrates that experiential and hedonic contexts result in stronger brand attitudes, in comparison with utilitarian contexts (Yoo and MacInnis, 2005) and shows that the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions is strongest for holistic consumers and weakest for utilitarian ones (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

Proposition 3b: The more memorable and rewarding brand experience, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

It is commonly accepted that experiences differ in their memorability, and few number are retrievable and result in word-of-mouth (Lemke *et al.*, 2010). According to O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002), pleasure derived from experiences is transient and short-lived. In this regard, pleasure will become enjoyment and an optimal experience if it generates intense attention, psychological growth and a sense of achievement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Gordon (2006) argues that brands are coded in consumer memory on an emotional and cognitive basis. These somatic markers (Damásio, 1999) are held in long-term memory and result from the sum of positive or negative experience that consumers have with brands. Pham (1998) argues that experiences act as a source of information, in which positive feelings lead to favourable brand evaluations, whereas negative feelings the converse. Furthermore, differences in individual optimum stimulation levels

(Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1992) and individual states of mind (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) influence how experiences are perceived and coded in memory.

Proposition 3c: The greater the extent to which the brand experience involves direct trials, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

The experiential view claims that products and services project multi-sensory cues that need to be seen, tasted, heard, smelled or touched to be truly felt and appreciated (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In their dyadic relationship with brands, consumers are becoming more sceptical of advertising stimuli that can only be confirmed through experience (Hoch, 2002). Direct trial during a brand experience is sometimes regarded as a means of obtaining experimental benefits. Moreover, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) argue that experiential appeals activate impulsive or goal-directed behaviour and facilitate brand engagement.

Construct 4: Brand sensuality

The concept of brand sensuality was first introduced by Krishna (2010), who drew on insights into the pleasure created by the human senses, when consumers relate to appealing products and services. According to Krishna (ibid), the appeal of a product or service can be increased either by creating new sensations or by emphasizing or drawing attention to existing sensations. In this regard, sensorial strategies were proposed as a means of differentiation which are able to affect perception, judgment and consumer behaviour and establish strong emotional ties with consumers (Krishna, 2011).

Proposition 4: The greater the significance of brand sensuality, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

The concept of brand sensuality is based on cognitive, emotional or value-based elements, which are intended to create brand awareness and brand image, enhance long-term customer-brand relationships and increase the quality of customer treatment, since it challenges the human mind and senses in a highly individualized manner. Moreover, in the brand-management domain, little attention has been paid to how brand sensuality impacts on consumer behaviour in purchase and consumption processes, since the main stream of sensory research has explored the impact of product and environmental sensory stimulus only individually (Krishna, 2010, 2011; Turley and Milliman, 2000) and cross-modal sensory interactions (Krishna, 2011). Of particular interest are some recent studies of sensory perception (Krishna, 2011), which have examined non-diagnostic sensory input (Krishna and Morrin, 2008), sensory dominance (Hoegg and Alba, 2007), congruence (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001), conflict (Krishna, 2006), overload (Lindstrom, 2005), imagery (Lwin *et al.*, 2010) and load (Elder and Krishna, 2012).

Brand sensuality is both relational and transaction-based and results from a dyadic relationship between the brand and the individual, in which human senses play a dominant role in the creation and delivery of meaningful and personalized multi-sensory brand-experiences. As Fournier argues (1991), as a primary dimension of brand meaning, tangibility determines whether the attribute basis of meaning is objective and verifiable through the senses (e.g. the sensory characteristics of products and services) or whether it is subjective and interpreted as the result of a multi-sensory brand experience (e.g. a specific brand personality). Moreover, sensorial strategies allow firms and brands to differentiate and to express a product, a service or a firm's identity in relation to the human mind and senses. From a tactical and strategic perspective, sensorial strategies for sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, either individually or combined, can be applied to communication, products, places and events and expressed by sensors, sensations and sensory expressions in the value-generating process.

Proposition 4a: The greater the input of sensory cues through the human senses, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

It is evident that human senses are the means by which consumers experience brands, allowing them to notice, filter and record a diversity of brand-related stimuli, form judgments about brand personalities and establish strong emotional connections with brands and other brand users. When consumers encode sensory information, the stimuli they encounter are transformed into a mental representation stored in the memory (Jansson-Boyd, 2010) that is synonymous with the brand (Grönroos, 2007). Following a hedonic experiential logic, consumer-based brand equity is embedded in the value that is created individually by each consumer when experiencing the brand through its senses.

Research on consumer sensory processing shows that sensory cues enhance the product and atmospherics experience, increase preferences for a given product and purchase likelihood, lead to greater confidence in product evaluations, and increase the amount consumers are willing to pay for products and services. A study from Grohmann *et al.* (2007) found that tactile input, such as softness and texture, have a positive effect on the evaluation of high quality products. Preference and purchase likelihood increase when consumers are allowed to physically inspect product categories in shopping environments that vary in the diagnosticity of touch, such as bath towels and carpeting (McCabe and Nowlis, 2003). As noted by Peck and Childers (2003), a lack of direct experience results in less self-confidence for individuals with a higher in "Need For Touch" (NFT), for whom material properties with pleasant sensory feedback is not compensated for by written product descriptions. Furthermore, touching an object results in a greater desire for ownership and a greater willingness to pay (Peck and Shu, 2009). Despite the influence of contamination sources on consumer behaviour, Argo *et al.* (2006) showed that the more sources of contact, the more popular a product may appear to be.

In the same line of research, Herz (1997, 1998, 2000) demonstrated that distinctive scents act as retrieval cues and are more emotional in nature than other sensory cues. In

this regard, Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000, 2003) conducted a laboratory experiment, in which they found that consumers have higher levels of brand recall and recognition with respect to a product package on a computer screen when simultaneously exposed to a pleasant scent. Hirsch (1995) also tested the effects of two pleasant ambient scents in a Las Vegas Casino and demonstrated that one of them has a positive effect on gambling mood and increased the amount gambled. These results are explained by the olfactory-evoked recall effect, in which memories are stimulated and generate a nostalgic gambling mood. More recently, Krishna *et al.* (2010) showed that product scent is a memory-enhancer and that olfactory cues improve verbal recall.

Empirical research on visual cues provides evidence that colors are associated with physical attraction, but do not influence approach behaviour (Bellizi *et al.*, 1983). These findings are consistent with Chandon *et al.* (2008), who found that visual cues in a store, such as price displays, increased the level of attention, but were not always effective in increasing expenditure. Furthermore, Bagchi and Cheema (2013) investigated the effect of colors on willingness-to-pay in auctions and negotiations and found that aggression is raised by the color red (compared to blue or gray) and therefore increases bid jumps in auctions and decreases offers in negotiations. In a recent food consumption experiment, Dubois *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that when consumers choose a product on the basis of its relative size, they believe they can signal their status. A similar experiment conducted by Ittersum and Wansink (2011) shows that reducing color contrast between the dinnerware and its background has a positive impact on serving and consumption behaviour.

Other empirical research on auditory cues expounds the effects of language associations with respect to brand names, products sounds, voices and music on consumer perceptions. A series of studies show that foreign names change hedonic perceptions of yogurt (Leclerc *et al.*, 1994), influence perceptions of beer (Allison and Uhl, 1964) and affect the perceived taste of ice cream (Yorkston and Menon, 2004). Moreover, consumers tend to evaluate low-pitched voices more favourably than high-pitched ones (Brown *et al.*, 1973) and the evocative power of music may carry both embodied and referential meanings (Krishna, 2011).

It is commonly accepted that individuality and the subjectivity of individual experience is dependent on how human senses perceive brand stimuli and how they interpret multi-sensory brand-experience, based on actual or previous experiences. Researchers have shown that women have a higher need for tactile input than men (Citrin *et al.*, 2003), and that motivation to touch and smell declines with age (Stevens and Patterson, 1995; Thornbury and Mistretta, 1981). In this sense, brand sensuality impacts on consumer behaviour in a personalized manner and facilitates the formation of brand as image, as the result of the experiential process. Thus, the more that firms stimulate the human senses to create a holistic experience and a distinctive brand as image, the more engaged the consumer will become and the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Proposition 4b: The greater the extent to which the sensory perceptions are perceived positively through the human senses, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

A number of neuroimaging studies have documented that human senses are linked to our memories and this research provides evidence that sensory perceptions activate specific regions in the brain that are directly related to emotions (Krishna, 2011). Expressing and differentiating products and services as sensations, through sensorial strategies, allows firms to attract consumers' attention, even in a message-saturated encounter, influence their brand perceptions and engage them emotionally (ibid).

As Keller and Lehman (2006) note product experiences are multi-sensory-based and impact on brand equity in several ways. It can be argued that brand sensuality can deliver a brand promise to consumers by attaching sensory associations to a product or a service. These associations are able to enhance the intrinsic characteristics of products (e.g. the smooth sound of a Mercedes-Benz door closing, which is associated with a premium product), or create a distinctive sensorial identity (e.g. the raw sound of a Harley Davidson bike which gives you the feeling of being wild and free). Human senses therefore act as retrieval cues when exposed to proximal, sensory brand-stimuli that are strong and positive enough to be reactivated. In this regard, consumers recognise brands unconsciously. Furthermore, sensory pleasure is identified as a source of product enthusiasm (Bloch, 1986) and as an attribute that arouses high product involvement (Martin, 1998).

Several studies on consumer research demonstrate that sensory cues have a positive impact on product and store evaluations, brand recall and recognition. Moreover, as a whole, research suggests that consumer evaluations tend to be more positive when sensory cues are congruent and naturally reinforcing. Spangenberg *et al.* (2005) demonstrated that a pleasant ambient scent improved store evaluations when it was seasonally congruent with the background music. In another study, Spangenberg *et al.* (2006) found that consumers increased their expenditures in a store selling clothing when the scent released in the air was congruent with the type of clothing being sold. In a field study, Morrin and Chebat (2005) found that impulsive shoppers spend more money when pleasant music is playing in a shopping mall. By contrast, contemplative shoppers or those who do not make unplanned purchases increase their expenditures when a pleasant scent was being released.

Considerable evidence suggests that sensory cues impact on time processing and that music, scents and colours improves consumer affective response and increases their perception of time. In this regard, Gueguen and Petr (2006) found that the scent of lavender increased the time spent in a pizzeria by 15%, when compared to an unscented environment. Mitchel *et al.* (1995) demonstrated that congruent scents released in stores lead consumers to spend more time processing product information. In a study about the effect of music on consumer perceptions, Kellaris and Kent (1992) and Hui *et al.* (1997) found that perceived time durations increased for consumers exposed to positively valenced music, which triggers a positive emotional response. In a study in which websites' background colours were manipulated during downloads, Gorn *et al.* (2004) found that colours induce feelings of relaxation (e.g. blue) and reduce perceived time durations.

A large body of consumer sensory processing research demonstrates that sensory cues affect behaviour and mood positively. In an interpersonal touch context (a bookstore, a restaurant and a supermarket), Hornick (1992) found that when an employee touched on the arm of a customer, positive feelings were elicited. Schiffman *et al.* (1995) and Villemure *et al.* (2003) found that pleasant fragrances, such as baby powder and perfume, improve mood and diminish some of the symptoms related to unpleasant otherwise physical conditions. Baron (1997) also demonstrated that individuals exposed to pleasant ambient scents in a shopping mall (e.g. roasting coffee, baking cookies) were more willing to help strangers. Moreover, Milliman (1982) found that background slower music created more leisurely in-store traffic and higher expenditures. A similar study showed that slow-tempo music in a restaurant leads diners to spend more time in a restaurant, drink more and increase their average expenditure (Milliman, 1986). Music-induced arousal in a banking context was investigated by Dubé *et al.* (1995), who demonstrated that faster tempo music heightens arousal and leads to positive and friendly consumer attitudes towards the bank employees.

Research on sensory processing also demonstrates that intrinsic sensory cues influence consumers' perceptions of product freshness, taste, weight and quality. A study by Zampini and Spence (2004) demonstrated that changing the sound a potato chip makes when bitten (e.g. loudness and frequency) can influence the perceived characteristics of the product (e.g. how fresh the potato is perceived to be). Moreover, Raghubir and Krishna (1999) show that whereas consumers perceive elongated containers to contain more, their actual experience contradicts this belief, subsequently convincing them that they have consumed more from the less elongated container.

In the domain of advertising, researchers have addressed the impact of hedonic perception on consumer behaviour. Peck and Wiggins (2006) found that adding tactile cues to an ad, such as a feather or a pamphlet requesting donations that make the consumer feel good, increase both persuasion and the likelihood of donation. Gorn *et al.* (1997) demonstrated that colours affect different reaction to ads, either feelings of relaxation (e.g. blue hues) or excitement (e.g. red hues). Park and Young (1986) suggested that music can trigger affective feelings or mood and act as a peripheral persuasion cue in advertising. Moreover, MacInnis and Park (1991) demonstrated that music heightens consumer involvement in an ad and stimulates the processing of advertised message and past emotion-laden experiences. Research also shows that when music is congruent with the ad message, brand and message recall is enhanced (Kellaris *et al.*, 1993).

Research has also tried to identify how sensory imagery affects brand evaluations and how consumers use extrinsic cues to infer product attributes. In an investigation of how German and French music influence wine selection, North *et al.* (1999) found that music activates wine shoppers related knowledge and the strong national associations had a positive effect on their product choices. Another study conducted by Areni and Kim (1993) shows that music generates associations regarding price, status and class, in that consumers purchase more expensive wines when classic music is playing in the store. As noted by Yorkston and Menon (2004), phonetic symbolism acts as a sensory cue that enables consumers to infer product attributes in the same way as a brand name. Research on visual imagery which focused on the inclusion of a product image in a

package demonstrated that it can be used as an extrinsic cue to communicate information about the product's sensory characteristics (Pavio, 1986). Underwood and Klein (2002) demonstrated that product imagery on packaging impacts on the consumers evaluations of both packaging and brands.

Proposition 4c: The greater the multi-sensory stimulation through the human senses, the higher the level of consumer-based brand equity.

Evidence

It has been suggested that brand experience becomes more effective and memorable, if a growing number of senses is engaged (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Lindstrom, 2005). Human senses act as filters or vehicles for experiencing products and services (Achrol and Kotler, 2012) and are a fast-track for engaging consumers emotionally (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Nevertheless, consumers are unaware of the influence of sensory cues on their preferences and judgments, which suggests that integrative judgments based on multisensory input are nonconscious or belong to a "hardwire genre" (Raghubir, 2010). The hardwire framework developed by Raghubir (ibid) proposes three information processing stages: nonconscious, heuristic and systematic.

Research shows that human senses influence the way brands are perceived. As Brakus *et al.* (2009) note, since brand related sensory stimulation engages the mind and body, the consumer might be willing to receive further stimulation if the experience is positive. Thus, the intensity of the brand experience is dependent on the number of brand dimensions used to create the experience and on how stimulation is managed, so as to engage consumers emotionally (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

In the last two decades, consumer sensory processing has begun to direct attention to the interplay of senses (Krishna, 2010). Various studies demonstrate sensory synergies between touch and vision (Balaji *et al.*, 2011), sound and taste (Zampini and Spence, 2004), touch and taste (Krishna and Morrin, 2008), vision and touch (Raghubir and Krishna, 1999), and vision and taste (Hoegg and Alba, 2007). In a recent series of experiments, Elder and Krishna (2010) examined how multiple and single senses incorporated in ads (e.g. coffee, chewing gum, popcorn and potato chips) affected awareness, intention to purchase and taste perception. They showed that taste perceptions were heightened and that the ad's effect on generating positive thoughts and sensory perception was moderated by the cognitive load, i.e., when the load is high, multisensory ads have a weaker positive effect. Furthermore, Elder *et al.* (2010) posit that adding multisensory cues to an ad may influence consumer imagery, perception, attitudes and behaviour and thus enhance the brand experience.

It is important to note that consumers, as individuals, perceive brand stimuli differently, based on their sensory characteristics and information content (Sheth *et al.*, 1999), which lead either positive or negative affective outcomes (Oliver, 1997). Moreover, Solomon (1999) argues that distinctive stimuli are more likely to be noticed. An empirical study from Gentile *et al.* (2007) demonstrated that the sensorial component was rated as most relevant across all well-known and successful products. The study also recognised the importance of experiential features in the value-generating process,

in which experiences dazzle the five senses and constantly stimulates consumers' minds by creating holistic, integrated and memorable experiences (Schmitt, 1999).

Dependent Variable: Consumer-based brand equity

By maximizing and leveraging consumer-based brand equity, through the mediation of brand personality, brand relationships, brand experiences and brand sensuality firms might develop competitive and sustainable advantages with a positive effect on business performance.

Proposition 5: Consumer-based brand equity, through the mediation of brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality, has a positive effect on business performance.

Evidence

As a construct, consumer-based brand equity is built upon distinctive and memorable multi-sensory brand-experiences and its positive associations in consumers' minds, *i.e.*, brand as image. Raggio and Leone (2007) argue that consumer-based brand equity contributes to the effectiveness of marketing activities and marketing costs reduction. Moreover, consumers react more positively towards product changes, product related harm, and brand extensions, which reduces firms' vulnerability to new competitors (Raggio and Leone, 2007; Pitta and Katsanis, 1995). Ailawadi *et al.* (2003) claims that firm-level outcomes (incremental volume, revenue, price commanded, profit and cash flow) result from consumer-level effects (positive image, attitude, knowledge and loyalty) and thus also suggests a revenue premium as an outcome measure of brand equity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has examined the need to develop an integrated conceptual model within a sensory branding framework. The model integrates such constructs as brand personality, brand relationship, brand experience and brand sensuality as antecedents to consumer-based brand equity and their impact on business performance. Such an integrated model has the potential to provide a new perspective in which sensory branding contributes to differentiating and positioning a brand in the minds of consumers through the human senses, sensations and sensory experiences.

The composition and orchestration of the chosen constructs are perhaps most useful within this framework. Together, they can be seen as the main antecedents of consumer-based brand equity in relation to brand as image. This allows marketing scholars to rethink each of the constructs separately and focus on the interrelationships between the constructs of consumer-based brand equity. Such a framework lays the foundation for understanding how human senses, sensations and sensory experiences are created and perceived by consumers within a service provision process.

The paper also contributes to the literature on branding, experiential and sensory marketing, in proposing a framework that provides opportunities for further empirical research on the relationship between the chosen constructs and consumer-based brand equity.

An important theoretical implication is that the proposed sensory branding framework brings together disparate constructs into a more cohesive integrated conceptual model with propositions and evidence. With this model, human senses, sensations and sensory experiences play a central role in the value-generating process. This view is in accordance with the assumption that consumers perceive and experience brands through the senses and that consumer-based brand equity is built on associations, experiences and marketing activities (Achrol and Kotler, 2012). Furthermore, consumers are directed mainly towards pleasure-orientated consumption and react positively towards brands that make them feel happy or joyful.

Another theoretical implication is that the sensory branding framework facilitates the co-creation of value with consumers in the focus of service provision and thus impacts on consumer-based brand equity. This will allow firms and their brands to express their personality, manage relationships with consumers and build meaningful and memorable brand experiences, as well as expressing brand sensuality.

A managerial implication is that brand managers might benefit from adopting a sensory branding framework, so as to achieve consumer-based brand equity and business performance. Moreover, the framework allows brand managers to appeal strategically to consumers' human senses through sensations and sensory experiences in positioning the brand as an image.

A useful future research avenue might involve empirical research in a B2C context, so as to validate the proposed conceptual model. Another avenue entails the development of appropriate scales for measuring consumer-based brand equity and business performance as a result of sensory branding.

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ESSAY 3

Rodrigues, C., B. Hultén, C. Brito e V. Martins (2013), “Brand Sensuality: An antecedent to consumer-based brand equity”.

Abstract

Consumer-based brand equity has been addressed as a significant construct in theory and practice for a long time in explaining how consumers perceive and experience brands. With the emergence of sensory marketing, it has been argued that brand sensuality as a concept could contribute to create a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image. Nevertheless, a theoretical gap has been identified in literature concerning how the concept of brand sensuality could be seen as an antecedent to CBBE. Moreover, there is a need to investigate the impact of brand sensuality in relation to brand experiences and measure its impact on CBBE in comparison to brand personality and brand relationship. The data was collected from 482 users of car brands in collaboration with ACP – the Automobile Portuguese Association and was analyzed using structural equation model (SEM). The empirical findings support that brand sensuality has a positive effect on CBBE through the mediation of brand experience. The main contribution of this paper is that it proposes a definition of brand sensuality within a sensorial brand approach. Furthermore, it analyses and explains the impact of brand sensuality in relation to brand experience and measures its impact on consumer-based brand equity.

Keywords:

Research paper, sensory branding, brand sensuality, consumer-based brand equity

1. INTRODUCTION

The brand-building process has received increased research attention during the last decades as a result of more and more brands striving to differentiate in highly competitive markets. With the emergence of a society characterized by information overload, a lack of time and an aestheticization of everyday life, marketing has reinvented itself as a discipline in contemporary society and has drawn on the conceptual accomplishments of the past in order to create a renewed focus on consumers as individuals with human senses and brands as images.

Interestingly, as leading subphenomenon of mainstream marketing, the human senses have once again been recognized as the vehicles through which consumers experience the world around them. In relation to products and services, human senses, sensations and sensory experiences are considered emergent marketing paradigms (Achrol and Kotler, 2012).

With the emergence of sensory marketing, it has been argued that brand sensuality as a concept could contribute to differentiate and position a brand as image in the human mind. Recent literature on branding and sensory marketing stress the significance and positive impact of sensory dimensions through brand sensuality in relation to brand

experiences within a value-generating process. Moreover, theoretical concerns are raised of how sensory dimensions contribute to enhance consumer-based brand equity when consumers experience products and services. Nevertheless, to this point, prior research on branding has not been able to capture this phenomenon as a whole and theoretically integrate sensory-based constructs into a conceptual framework with regard to the significance of sensory dimensions for brand experiences in the brand-building and value-generating process (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Schmitt, 1999, 2012; Krishna, 2011; Keller, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003).

In order to fill the existing research gap, the present empirical study proposes brand sensuality as an antecedent to CBBE and it raises the following research question:

Is the construct of brand sensuality through the mediation of brand experiences an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity in a B2C context?

In this study we define brand sensuality as “*The firm’s ability to seduce and engage consumers emotionally through the involvement of the five human senses, when consumers experience goods and services as a result of multisensory brand-experiences*”.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and discuss: 1) the significance of a brand sensuality construct and its effect on brand experiences, 2) how brand sensuality as a construct through brand experiences could be seen as an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity and 3) how firms could apply brand sensuality in order to create a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, the theoretical constructs, research model and hypotheses are presented. In section 3, the research design for the quantitative study is presented. In section 4, the findings are discussed. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the main theoretical and managerial contributions, as well as a number of limitations and suggestions for potential research.

2. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS AND HYPOTHESES

Any direct or indirect encounter between a brand and a consumer might impact on the mental picture of a brand in the memory of consumers (i.e. brand image) and contribute to brand equity. This might occur when a consumer is exposed to any kind of environmental input and stimuli perceived by the human senses as a result of marketing activities (Keller, 1993, 2002; de Chernatony and Horn, 2003).

Theories on consumer-based brand equity put in evidence the differential effect on consumer response to marketing activities, whereas there is a large disagreement on its sources. The most dominant influence on this body of research are Aaker’s (1991) and Keller’s (1993) conceptualizations. Aaker (1991, p.15) defines brand equity as a “*set of categories of brand assets (liabilities) linked to a brand’s name or symbol that add to (subtract from) the value provided by a product or a service*”. On the other hand,

Keller (1993, p. 8) defines brand equity as “*the differential effect of a brand knowledge on consumer response to marketing efforts of a brand.*”

The common denominator in these conceptualizations is that brand equity has a consumer-based brand focus and stands for what a brand really means for consumers (Raggio and Leone, 2007), since it exists “*within a consumer and not within a brand*” (Keller, 1993). As proposed by Keller (ibid, p. 2), consumer-based brand equity “*occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory*”. In this regard, consumer-based brand equity moderates “*the impact of marketing activities on consumer’s actions*” (Raggio and Leone, 2007, p. 380).

Recent literature on branding shares the perspective that brand equity is multidimensional (Pappu *et al.*, 2005). Given this view, branding constructs such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993), brand relationship (Blackston, 1992; Jones, 2005; Esch *et al.*, 2006) and brand experience (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) are suggested as antecedents to consumer-based brand equity. In this paper, as previously stated in the introduction, brand sensuality is proposed as a key driver of brand value in the focus of service provision, following a consumer-centric perspective.

The brand personality construct

Brand personality is identified in branding and marketing literature as a key determinant of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Biel, 1993; Keller, 1993; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Defined as “*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand*” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), brand personality serves a symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993) and facilitates the process of animating the brand as dynamic entity in consumer’s mind as a result of its marketing activities and brand experiences (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999). Support for this assumption is given by some scholars, who argue that a strong brand personality evokes emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993), encourages systematic and active processing with high motivation (Biel, 1993), increases the levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998) and enhances consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982).

In this empirical study it is hypothesized that brand personality has an effect on brand experiences and thereby being an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. The following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Brand personality, through the mediation of brand experience, has a positive effect on consumer-based brand equity.

The brand relationship construct

Considered as a logic extension of brand personality, the concept of consumer-brand relationship is identified as a long-term interactive process, involving the consumer, the brand stakeholders and the brand as an active, productive and enthusiastic relationship partner in the value-generating process (Blackston, 1992; Fournier, 1998; Grönroos, 2007; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). In this regard, the brand is perceived as a behavioural

entity that adds meanings to consumers' lives (Ligas and Cotte) and facilitates multifaceted holistic relationships in which the brand play an important role (Schmitt, 1999) in binding consumers together.

Merz *et al.* (2009) argue that brand value is co-created by affective relationships that consumers form with brands as a result of direct or indirect brand experiences. In this context, the sum of the experiences that the consumer establishes with a particular brand in different encounters forms the brand relationship (Grönroos, 2007). Grounded on the relationship marketing literature, Esch *et al.* (2006) propose a model which combines brand knowledge and brand relationship as antecedents to consumer-based brand equity. This branding perspective suggests that the brand co-creation process is dynamic and relational (Blackston, 1992, Merz *et al.*, 2009; Grönroos, 2007) and that its value rests in the minds of consumers, opinion makers and stakeholders as a result of a social interaction (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Jones, 2005).

In this empirical study it is hypothesized that brand relationships has an effect on brand experiences and thereby being an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. The following hypothesis is presented:

H2: Brand relationship, through the mediation of brand experience, has a positive effect on consumer-based brand equity

The brand sensuality construct

In this paper, the definition of brand sensuality is grounded on sensory experiences based on pleasure stimuli and input perceived by the human senses, when consumers experience appealing products and services in the value-generating process. Moreover, brand sensuality is both transactional and relational-based and results from an interactive and personalized relationship between the brand and the consumer, in which the five human senses have a central role in creating and delivering unique and meaningful multi-sensory brand-experiences.

Academic research on human senses stresses how sensory dimensions impact the brand value co-creation as a result of multi-sensory brand-experiences (Hultén, 2011). These studies assume that human senses influence the ways brands are perceived by consumers, when they experience products and services, and highlight the importance of sensory dimensions as facilitators of emotional engagement and interaction between consumers and brands (e.g. Krishna, 2010, Hultén, 2011).

As Keller and Lehman (2006) note product experiences are multi-sensory-based and impact on brand equity in several ways. Hence, it can be argued that the way the brand expresses itself to consumer delivers a brand promise by attaching sensory associations to a product or a service. These associations are able to enhance the intrinsic characteristics of products or services (e.g. the smooth sound of a Mercedes-Benz door closing, which is associated with a premium product), or create a distinctive sensorial identity (e.g. the raw sound of a Harley Davidson bike that gives you the feeling of being wild and free). Human senses therefore act as retrieval cues when exposed to proximal, sensory brand-stimuli that are strong and positive enough to be reactivated

through sensorial strategies. In this regard, consumers recognize brands unconsciously along the value-generating process based on their brand sensuality.

In this empirical study it is hypothesized that brand sensuality has an effect on brand experiences and thereby being an antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. The following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Brand sensuality, through the mediation of brand experience, has a positive effect on consumer-based brand equity.

The brand experience construct

The concept of brand experience was recently introduced into marketing literature by Brakus *et al.* (2009, p. 59) and defined as “*subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments*”. Drawing on insights from Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999), these scholars identified four brand dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural) which are evoked, directly or indirectly, by a set of distinctive related stimuli when consumers search for, shop for or consume brands (Schmitt, 1999; Arnold *et al.*, 2005; Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

It is commonly accepted that brand experience results from an interactive process between a consumer and a firm in holistic direct and indirect encounters. In this regard, the seductive aspects of experience attract consumers’ attention and brand experience acts as a source of information in brand evaluations (Pham, 1998). Furthermore, brand experience impacts positively on consumer satisfaction, loyalty and brand associations, through brand personality, and facilitates brand engagement (Gentile *et al.*, 2007; Hoch, 2002; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). As Brakus *et al.* (2009) and Mertz *et al.* (2009) note brand experiences are not motivationally orientated and brand value can be created indirectly even if consumers do not become brand buyers.

In this empirical study it is hypothesized that brand experiences has an effect on consumer-based brand equity. The following hypothesis is presented:

H4: Brand experience has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity.

In line with the four aforementioned hypotheses we propose a research model (Figure 1), in order to investigate the structural relationships between brand personality, brand relationship, brand sensuality, brand experience and consumer-based brand equity. Structural equation modeling (SEM) following AMOS (version 21) was selected, instead of the traditional method of multiple regressions, to analyze the proposed structural relationships. This statistical technique offers a set of versatile and effective tools, which allows researchers to simultaneously analyze the overall model fit and estimate the direct and indirect effect of the predictor’s variables in a causal model (Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Hair *et al.*, 2009).

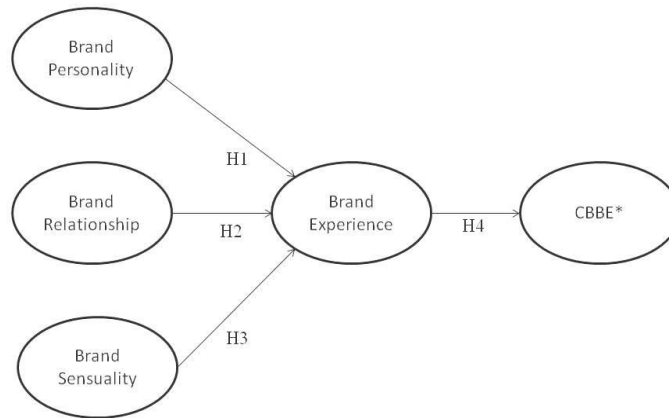


Figure 1. Research model

3. METHODOLOGY

Relevant literature on branding and marketing shows that a majority of studies on consumer-based brand equity is conceptual-based and only a minority has investigated CBBE empirically. In fact, a great body of empirical studies on automobile industry accounts for the study of brand personality influence on CBBE (Branaghan and Hildebrand, 2011; Maehle and Supphellen, 2010; Ramaseshan and Tsao, 2007; Rojas-Mendez *et al.*, 2007), thus neglecting other branding constructs such as brand relationship, brand sensuality and brand experience. Furthermore, research in this domain has mainly focused on student samples, which tend to create some investigation bias. One exception is Pappu *et al.* (2005) empirical study conducted on cars and televisions.

The empirical study presented in this paper encompasses a quantitative research strategy and was undertaken with the collaboration of ACP – the Portuguese Automobile Association, allowing the researchers to use a sample of real consumers. To our knowledge this research is the first to fully explain how consumers perceive and experience car brands and the significance of brand sensuality on creating a positive brand experience and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing CBBE.

Survey design

In order to test the hypotheses proposed in the research model, a standardized questionnaire was designed to measure the impact of brand personality, brand relationship, brand sensuality and brand experience on consumer-based brand equity. The questions of the survey are based on the literature review and on specific automobile industry characteristics collected during interviews conducted with Portuguese marketing managers of Volvo, Seat, Toyota and Chevrolet brands. Moreover, respondents are asked to answer the survey questions keeping in mind the brand of the car they own or that they usually drive.

Firstly, a pre-test was carried out with randomly selected car owners in northern Portugal. Thereafter, the survey was revised and improved based on the feedback from a

sample of twenty car owners. Finally, a field survey was conducted online, in august 2013, in cooperation with ACP - the Automobile Association in Portugal using a convenience sample of car owners, which corresponds to the database of associates of ACP.

The questionnaire consisted of six sections. The first section deals with the measurement of brand relationship with a six-item scale adopted from the work of McAlexander *et al.* (2002), Maehle and Supphellen (2010) and Matzler *et al.* (2011). Departing from the work of Yoo and Donthu (2001) the second section deals with the measurement of the consumer-based brand equity, using a seven-item scale. In the third and fourth section, a nine-item scale to measure brand sensuality and a five-item scale to measure brand experience were adapted from Brakus *et al.* (2009) and combined with new items proposed by the researcher. The fifth section deals with the measurement of brand personality using a seven-item scale following Aaker (1997). The items for each construct are reported in the Appendix II. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement level towards each item of five sections on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by “much inadequate” (=1) to “much adequate” (=5) for brand personality. The same 5-point Likert scale was used for brand relationship, consumer-based brand equity, brand sensuality and brand experience anchored by “strongly disagree” (=1) to “strongly agree” (=5). Finally, the sixth section gathers standard demographic and lifestyle information, using a categorical scale with 8 items, namely gender, occupation, education level, marital status, residential area, age, household, and interest areas.

Sample size and data analysis

A total of 679 surveys were answered online across several Portuguese cities in August 2013. Data analysis, using Amos version 21 and SPSS Statistics version 21 software, was carried out in three steps. Firstly, data was examined for missing values and potential errors in data entry. Given the large sample, surveys with missing values and outliers were removed from the initial data and 482 surveys were coded. The presented quantitative research adopts a convenience sample of car owners. The sample shows that 78 percent of respondents are male and 22 percent are female. The average age is 43.5 years old. The great majority is employed (74 percent), holds an university degree (59 percent), is married (53 percent) and the household average is 2.7 members. Most of respondents enjoy travelling (74 percent) and are fond of music (62 percent) and technology (61 percent).

Secondly, the reliability of data was analyzed by measuring Cronbach's α for all the scales used in this research. Results of reliability test for all scales are presented in Table I and account for an adequate level of internal reliability, since most of the values are above the recommended figure of 0,80 (Bryman and Bell, 2011)

Sr no.	Variables	Cronbach's α	No. of items
1	Brand Personality	0,825	5
2	Brand Relationship	0,737	4
3	Brand Sensuality	0,884	4
4	Brand Experience	0,884	4
5	Consumer-based brand equity	0,809	7

Table I. Reliability statistics

Finally, we conducted an analysis to examine the adequacy of each multi-item scale in capturing each construct. The reliability of the measures was tested by calculating the composite reliability (CR) of the constructs and the average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table II, the internal validity of the measurement model is adequate, since the factor reliability ranges from .702 to .862. Furthermore, although the AVE for brand personality and brand relationship constructs range from .360 to .408, brand sensuality construct showed good psychometric properties as the AVE is above .562.

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	Brand Relationship	Brand Personality	Brand Sensuality
Brand Relationship	0,740	0,319	0,382	0,351	0,565		
Brand Personality	0,878	0,488	0,432	0,375	0,565	0,699	
Brand Sensuality	0,918	0,538	0,432	0,407	0,618	0,657	0,734

Table II. Internal validity

Structural Model and Hypotheses Test

After conducting maximum likelihood estimation using structural equation modeling (SEM), results show that all the variables in the proposed model are correlated. Interestingly, the findings also demonstrate that some items have a weakest regression weight in the model estimation. In order to purify the scales, the items with strong cross-loadings and with factor loadings below .4 were eliminated. As a result, the final model estimation indicates that the data has a good fit on the proposed model (CMIN/DF = 2,545, GFI = .906, AGFI = .881; CFI = .943; RMSEA = 0,57) and all the suggested paths of the model are statistically significant (Figure 2).

4. FINDINGS

Our findings, as shown in Table III, support the hypothesis H3 and accounts for the positive impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity through the mediation of brand experience. Furthermore, the findings also support hypotheses H1 and H2 that brand personality and brand relationship impacts positively on CBBE when

mediated by brand experience. In conclusion, brand experience mediates the impact in the value-generating process (H4) for the all the analyzed branding constructs, i.e brand personality, brand relationship and brand sensuality.

The empirical findings on car brands demonstrate that the direct relationship between brand sensuality and brand experience yields the highest standardized estimates (Estimate 0,755; C.R. 7,921; at $p > 0.001$) followed by brand personality (Estimate 0,61; C.R. 5,471; at $p > 0.001$), which accounts for the significance of brand sensuality as key antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. On the other hand, the weakest direct relationship, though significant, was found between brand relationship and brand experience (Estimate 0,144; C.R. 3,108; at $p > 0.002$). Moreover, brand experience shows a positive direct effect on consumer-based brand equity (Estimate 0,257; C.R. 7,929; at $p > 0.001$) when mediating through brand personality, brand relationship and brand sensuality.

<i>Hypotheses relationships</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>C.R.</i>
<i>Brand Experience <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>0,61</i>	<i>5,471</i>
<i>Brand_Experience <--- Brand Relationship</i>	<i>0,144</i>	<i>3,108</i>
<i>Brand_Experience <--- Brand Sensuality</i>	<i>0,755</i>	<i>7,921</i>
<i>CBEE <--- Brand Experience</i>	<i>0,257</i>	<i>7,929</i>
<i>BP 1 <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>BP 2 <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>1,952</i>	<i>11,504</i>
<i>BP 3 <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>0,856</i>	<i>12,08</i>
<i>BP 4 <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>1,474</i>	<i>10,481</i>
<i>BP 5 <--- Brand Personality</i>	<i>1,642</i>	<i>10,632</i>
<i>BR 1 <--- Brand Relationship</i>	<i>0,457</i>	<i>8,243</i>
<i>BR 2 <--- Brand Relationship</i>	<i>0,72</i>	<i>12,69</i>
<i>BR 3 <--- Brand Relationship</i>	<i>0,868</i>	<i>14,811</i>
<i>BR 4 <--- Brand Relationship</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>BS 1 <--- Brand Sensuality</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>BS 2 <--- Brand Sensuality</i>	<i>1,266</i>	<i>16,482</i>
<i>BS 3 <--- Brand Sensuality</i>	<i>1,227</i>	<i>16,162</i>
<i>BS 4 <--- Brand Sensuality</i>	<i>1,174</i>	<i>15,439</i>
<i>BE 1 <--- Brand Experience</i>	<i>0,819</i>	<i>19,53</i>
<i>BE 2 <--- Brand Experience</i>	<i>0,888</i>	<i>21,199</i>
<i>BE 3 <--- Brand Experience</i>	<i>0,761</i>	<i>17,605</i>
<i>BE 4 <--- Brand Experience</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>CBBE 1 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>CBBE 2 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>1,56</i>	<i>10,192</i>
<i>CBBE 3 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>0,529</i>	<i>5,613</i>
<i>CBBE 4 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>2,985</i>	<i>8,448</i>
<i>CBBE 5 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>2,869</i>	<i>8,202</i>
<i>CBBE 6 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>2,345</i>	<i>7,804</i>
<i>CBBE 7 <--- CBBE</i>	<i>1,86</i>	<i>7,875</i>
<i>Notes: All values are significant at $p > 0.001$; CBBE - Consumer-based brand equity</i>		

Table III. Standardized estimates of the paths

By examining brand personality construct, we conclude that car brands that have an exciting personality yield the highest coefficient (BP 2 = 1,952) when compared to competent brands (BP 3 = 0,856). These results show that car brands that are animated as exciting entities in consumer's mind achieve to enhance consumer-based brand equity. Furthermore, these findings acknowledge the importance of developing branding strategies based on a pleasure consumption approach which seeks fantasy, fun and feelings (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and stress the importance of building brands that make consumers happy or joyful.

The results for brand relationship construct reveal that consumer-brand relationship is unidirectional and account for low levels of interactivity between car brands and consumers in the value-generating process (BR 1 = 0,457). Though car brands are perceived as behavioural entities that facilitate the process of differentiation (BR 2 = 0,72) and help revealing the consumers' personality based on the car they drive (BR 3 = 0,868), it misses the opportunity to build a solid and intimate relationship with consumers. This is especially relevant because it seems that consumers do not consider car brands to be active, enthusiastic and productive relationship partners. Hence, it can be argued that lower levels of relational brand attractiveness in an individualized manner may impact negatively on consumer-based brand equity.

Following our expectations brand sensuality construct yields highest coefficients across all items. A detailed analysis demonstrates that car brands appeal to trial (BS 1 = 1) in their dyadic relationship with brands. As stated in literature, direct trial is regarded as a means of obtaining sensory and experiential benefits which facilitates brand engagement (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Findings also show that car brands provide sensory experiences (BS 2 = 1,266) by expressing their brand sensuality based on multiple sensory dimensions. In this regard, consumers seem to truly feel and appreciate these sensory experiences, since they consider car brands are interesting in a sensory way (BS 3 = 1,227). Moreover, car brands engage consumers emotionally by stimulating all the five senses (BS 4 = 1,174) when creating holistic and memorable multi-sensory brand-experiences. Hence, it can be argued that brand sensuality intensifies the seductive aspects of brand experience and that brand value is created when consumers experience goods and services through the five human senses.

Interestingly, brand experience coefficients also confirm that consumers relate to brands to derive hedonic gratification. Findings show that car brands make consumers happy (BE 1 = 0,819) and provide them with pleasure (BE 2 = 0,888). Nevertheless, car brands yield low levels of fun orientation (BE 3 = 0,761), which may account for an overload of functional benefits claimed by some car brands in their advertisement strategies. Even though, the first experience with car brands revealed to be positive, which make consumers get in love with the brand the first time they tried it (BE 4 = 1). In this regard, it can be argued that brand sensuality plays an important role in appealing to consumers when they experience goods and services for the first time, so as to create unforgettable and unique experiences and engage them emotionally.

Finally, a detailed analysis of consumer-based brand equity coefficients shows that consumers are loyal to their car brands (CBBE 4 = 2,985) and yield high levels of satisfaction (CBBE 5 = 2,869) as a result of brand experiences in multiple encounters,

such as products, communication, events and points-of-sale. Regarding brand attachment, findings show that consumers would be willing to pay a higher price for the same brand in a future purchase (CBBE 6 = 2,345) and recommend their car brand to their friends (CBBE 7 = 1,86). Interestingly, brand awareness deriving from visual stimulus such as brand logo yields the lowest coefficient in relation to consumer-based brand equity (CBBE 3 = 0,529). This may indicate that brand's perceived value-in-use is not highly determined by symbolic brand features such as a logo as traditionally claimed by transactional marketing. Instead, it seems that consumers recognize their car brands among other competing brands (CBBE 1 = 1) based on an overall brand experience which include all the five human senses, allowing them to quickly recall of some car brand distinctive characteristics (CBBE 2 = 1,56). In this regard, it might be argued that positive brand experiences impact on consumer-based brand equity, thus enhancing a positive and strong brand image in the human mind.

5. DISCUSSION

Branding literature shares the perspective that brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, as concepts, are the most relevant antecedents to consumer-based brand equity. However, a consumer-centric perspective put in evidence the need to rethink how brand value is created within a sensory branding framework.

From a theoretical point of view, this paper conceptualizes and proposes brand sensuality as a construct in explaining the role of sensory dimensions in the enhancement of the perceived value-in-use as a result of a multi-sensory brand-experience. This extends our knowledge of existing branding and marketing theories, so as to consider the deliberate involvement of human senses to construct an image of a brand, based on individual perceptions and experiences in different purchase and consumption processes.

Furthermore, the paper analyses and discusses the significance of brand sensuality construct within a sensory branding framework and challenges both scholars and marketers to rethink brands as dynamic entities imbued of sensory dimensions, which constantly appeal to consumers' senses along the value-generating process in multiple encounters, such as products, communication, events and points-of-sale. It should be noted that, brand sensuality, as a construct, is integrated for the first time into a consumer-based brand equity context, along with traditional branding constructs such as brand personality, brand relationship and brand experience, identified previously in literature as key drivers of brand value.

Another important theoretical contribution is that this paper provides empirical evidence that brand sensuality is one of the key antecedents to CBBE through the mediation of brand experience. The findings suggest that brand sensuality plays an important role in facilitating a holistic interaction between brands and consumers who look for sensory and experiential benefits in the value-generating process.

From a methodological point of view, this paper enriches consumer-based brand equity measurement by incorporating brand sensuality measures, which accounts for the multidimensionality of CBBE as previously suggested by Pappu *et al.* (2005). In this

regard, it should be noted that the brand experience scale proposed by Brakus *et al.* (2009) was split in two parts: one accounting for experiential dimensions measures (brand experience scale) and another for the sensory dimensions scales (brand sensuality scale). Moreover, the proposed brand sensuality scale incorporates some new items in order to measure brand sensuality with more accuracy.

A managerial implication is that brand managers might benefit from adopting a sensory branding framework in order to create brand value. The findings of the empirical study yield new insights into the significance of adopting brand sensuality, based on sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste in relation to different sensory dimensions in a B2C context. By appealing to consumers' human senses through sensations and sensory experiences, brand managers are allowed to position more efficiently the brand as an image in the human mind as thus enhance the consumer-based brand equity.

To date, branding strategies have been more or less limited to standard marketing-mix techniques, in which the creation of strong brand personalities through advertising and loyalty programs for enhancing consumer-brand relationships are in the focus of the marketing strategy. Brand sensuality in a sensory branding framework opens endless possibilities to contemporary brand management by highlighting the need to engage consumers emotionally through unique sensory dimensions and in creating memorable multi-sensory brand-experiences.

By defining consisting and appealing brand sensuality, a firm will be able to seduce its consumers through different sensory dimensions by using the five senses when they experience products and services. This may require that marketers should not only define how the brand behaves or relates to consumers, but also how the brand should express its sensuality to consumers through sensory dimensions, applied to products, communication, events and points-of-sale, either individually or combined.

The shift into a more customer-centric perspective in the brand-building and value-generating process implies that marketers recognize the importance of brand sensuality in creating positive brand experiences and thereby stronger brand image in enhancing consumer-based brand equity. By recognizing the significance of brand sensuality as a key antecedent to CBBE, marketers will be able to adopt a more emotional-based brand strategy in order to differentiate and position a brand in the human mind.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Research on the impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity is still in its infancy and offers exciting avenues of research. One of the limitations of this paper is that it only analyzes the impact of brand sensuality on CBBE for car brands. Thus, it might be important to investigate this issue on different product categories in a B2C context. Moreover, investigation in a B2B context is also recommended in order to understand the impact of brand sensuality both on products and services.

Another important limitation refers to the fact that the empirical study was made in Portugal, which may account for some cultural bias. It might be interesting to replicate this investigation for example in a northern European country in order to cross empirical

findings with a southern European country as Portugal. By analyzing the empirical results in two different countries from a cultural point of view, will allow to better understand the impact of brand sensuality on consumer-based brand equity across cultures.

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